# Galaxy
## SCIENCE FICTION

JULY 1954

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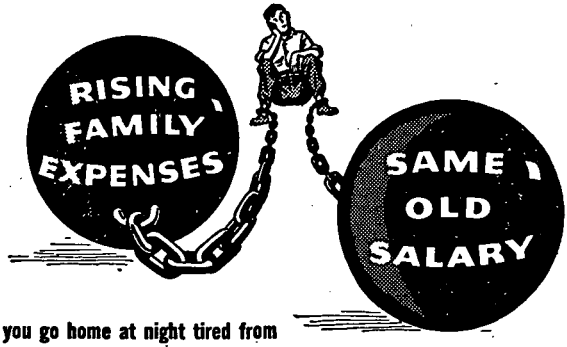


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JULY, 1954 VOL. 8, NO. 4

# Galaxy
## SCIENCE FICTION

**ALL ORIGINAL STORIES • NO REPRINTS!**

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# CAREER OFFERED

A GOOD many writers who have broken into GALAXY have tried to tell me how it feels. They couldn't, because the words haven't yet been invented. But there was no need to try—it was just twenty years ago, exactly half my lifetime, that I sold my first story and I well remember my dazzled feeling that a miracle had been passed.

As a matter of fact, I can't think of anything about that first sale that wasn't miraculous. Jobs in 1934 were desperately scarce; I hunted by day and wrote by night. Every door had a "No Help Wanted" sign and my manuscripts seemed to be opened by a machine that slipped them unread, along with a rejection slip, into the return envelope. Where did magazines get their material? More machines, obviously.

I had found a job as busboy. The hours were from 10 A.M. to 4 A.M. Then I had to walk several miles home because the buses didn't run that late at night. When I came back the next morning, I was laid off with an astonishing explanation.

The boss, an artistic type, couldn't stand the sight of a writer collecting dirty dishes!

I argued baffledly that I had never sold anything and so was not yet a writer, that I was gaining experience in life's hard realities for later use—and, in any case, he wasn't paying me; the waiters were!

He agreed sorrowfully that I was right on all counts. But he still couldn't bear the sight of even a future writer stacking dishes.

The morning mail had come when I got back home, furious and worried. There was a business envelope instead of a manuscript in the box. I had sold my first story!

Do you think anybody has to tell me how that feels?

Do you think anybody *could?*

There's more of a point to this than mere reminiscence, of course —the short-story contest we are running in cooperation with the American Humanist Association, for at least one college student, and I hope many more, will feel the same touch of the wand—and the rest of us will share that triumph in the enjoyment of reading work by fresh, vigorous new talent.

Here is a pertinent heartfelt quote from my introduction to the *First* GALAXY *Reader of Science Fiction:*

"Were I an envious man, which



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I am, I would resent the break that authors have today in rates and markets. There were very few science fiction magazines (in the 1930s), their rates ranging from microscopic fractions of a cent payable upon lawsuit to just enough to starve on . . .

"Crashing GALAXY is no cinch, as (its) stories, with their fine ideas, sharp characterization and shrewd craftsmanship, more than adequately prove.

"No doubt there is a lesson to be derived from this. Writing science fiction in the early days was easier, but the pay was poor. Writing for GALAXY is much harder, but the pay is highly rewarding both in amount and prestige.

"I guess it balances out. Either way, writing — especially the writing of science fiction—is not a job for the lazy. A good story, such as you'll find here, gives the illusion of having been produced effortlessly. Nothing involves more effort than achieving that illusion, however."

In other words, don't kid yourself that writing is a substitute for work. It requires as hard an apprenticeship as any other profession. But there is this difference — no other profession has as low a starting age. I was twenty when I began to sell, but many broke in at seventeen and eighteen . . . and one girl was fourteen when she started a very successful series!

Naturally, few of us sold our very first story. And I'd like to say that, when the maiden sale was made, we all lived happily ever after. But each found there was still plenty to be learned about the selection and development of theme, characterization and incident. And we're all still capable of turning out occasional duds.

If I'm forced to state the most important ingredient, I am afraid I have to contradict Somerset Maugham. He, you remember, urged a friend to write and was told, "But I don't have any ideas." Maugham said, "That is the weakest excuse for not writing I have ever heard!"

The essence of science fiction is ideas. If you're thinking in terms of atomic or cosmic warfare or matriarchies or chlorophyll products turning people into plants, stop and start over—these and other such obvious themes have been worked to death. You need a bright, fresh idea. *Then* you have to know what to do with it dramatically.

To get back to an earlier point —no, magazines don't have automatic remailing or story-writing machines!

I just thought you might be wondering.

—H. L. GOLD



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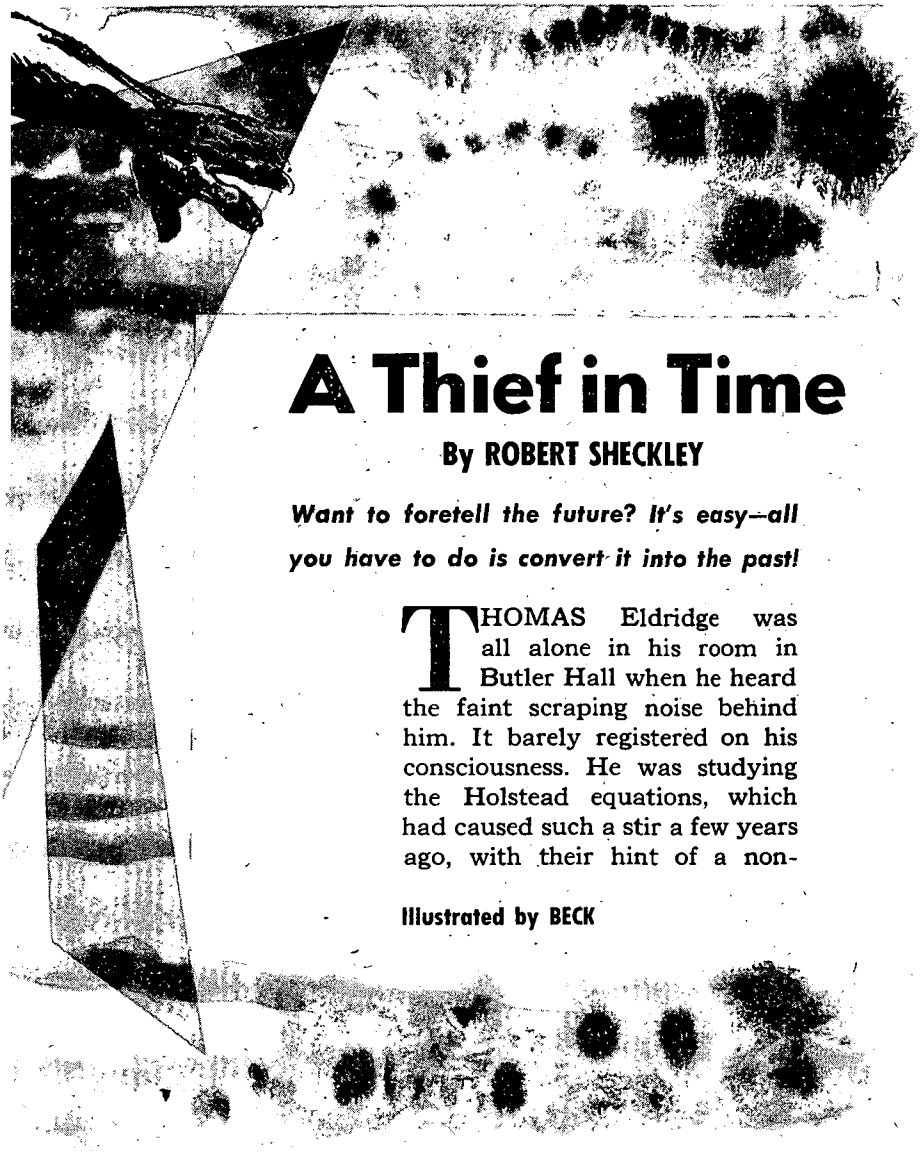

# A Thief in Time

**By ROBERT SHECKLEY**

***Want to foretell the future? It's easy—all you have to do is convert it into the past!***

THOMAS Eldridge was all alone in his room in Butler Hall when he heard the faint scraping noise behind him. It barely registered on his consciousness. He was studying the Holstead equations, which had caused such a stir a few years ago, with their hint of a non-

**Illustrated by BECK**



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Relativity universe. They were a disturbing set of symbols, even though their conclusions had been proved quite fallacious.

Still, if one examined them without preconceptions, they seemed to prove something. There was a strange relationship of temporal elements, with interesting force-applications. There was—he heard the noise again and turned his head.

Standing in back of him was a large man dressed in ballooning purple trousers, a little green vest and a porous silver shirt. He was carrying a square black machine with several dials and he looked decidedly unfriendly.

They stared at each other. For a moment, Eldridge thought it was a fraternity prank. He was the youngest associate professor at Carvell Tech, and some student was always handing him a hard-boiled egg or a live toad during Hell Week.

But this man was no giggling student. He was at least fifty years old and unmistakably hostile.

"How'd you get in here?" Eldridge demanded. "And what do you want?"

THE man raised an eyebrow. "Going to brazen it out, eh?"

"Brazen what out?" Eldridge asked, startled.

"This is Viglin you're talking to," the man said. "*Viglin.* Remember?"

Eldridge tried to remember if there were any insane asylums near Carvell. This Viglin looked like an escaped lunatic.

"You must have the wrong man," Eldridge said, wondering if he should call for help.

Viglin shook his head. "You are Thomas Monroe Eldridge," he said. "Born March 16, 1926, in Darien, Connecticut. Attended the University Heights College, New York University, graduating *cum laude*. Received a fellowship to Carvell last year, in early 1953. Correct so far?"

"All right, so you did a little research on me for some reason. It better be a good one or I call the cops."

"You always were a cool customer. But the bluff won't work. *I* will call the police."

He pressed a button on the machine. Instantly, two men appeared in the room. They wore light-weight orange and green uniforms, with metallic insignia on the sleeves. Between them they carried a black machine similar to Viglin's except that it had white stenciling on its top.

"Crime does not pay," Viglin said. "Arrest that thief!"

For a moment, Eldridge's pleasant college room, with its Gauguin prints, its untidy piles



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of books, its untidier hi-fi, and its shaggy little red rug, seemed to spin dizzily around him. He blinked several times, hoping that the whole thing had been induced by eyestrain. Or better yet, perhaps he had been dreaming.

But Viglin was still there, dismayingly substantial.

The two policemen produced a pair of handcuffs and walked forward.

"Wait!" Eldridge shouted, leaning against his desk for support. "What's this all about?"

"If you insist on formal charges," Viglin said, "you shall have them." He cleared his throat. "Thomas Eldridge, in March, 1962, you invented the Eldridge Traveler. Then—"

"Hold on!" Eldridge protested. "It isn't 1962 yet, in case you didn't know."

Viglin looked annoyed. "Don't quibble. You *will* invent the Traveler in 1962, if you prefer that phrasing. It's all a matter of temporal viewpoint."

It took Eldridge a moment to digest this.

Then it struck him.

"Do you mean—you are from the future?" he blurted.

ONE of the policemen nudged the other. "What an act!" he said admiringly.

"Better than a groogly show," the other agreed, clicking his handcuffs.

"Of course we're from the future," Viglin said. "Where else would we be from? In 1962, you did—or will—invent the Eldridge Time Traveler, thus making time travel possible. With it, you journeyed into the first sector of the future, where you were received with highest honors. Then you traveled through the three sectors of Civilized Time, lecturing. You were a hero, Eldridge, an ideal. Little children wanted to grow up to be like you."

With a husky voice, Viglin continued. "We were deceived. Suddenly and deliberately, you stole a quantity of valuable goods. It was shocking! We had never suspected you of criminal tendencies. When we tried to arrest you, you vanished."

Viglin paused and rubbed his forehead wearily. "I was your friend, Tom, the first person you met in Sector One. We drank many a bowl of flox together. I arranged your lecture tour. And you robbed me."

His face hardened. "Take him, officers."

As the policemen moved forward, Eldridge had a good look at the black machine they shared. Like Viglin's, it had several dials and a row of push buttons. Stamped in white across the top



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were the words: ELDRIDGE TIME TRAVELER—PROPERTY OF THE EASKILL POLICE DEPT.

The policeman stopped and turned to Viglin. "You got the extradition papers?"

Viglin searched his pockets. "Don't seem to have them on me. But you *know* he's a thief!"

"Everybody knows that," the policeman said. "But we got no jurisdiction in a pre-contact sector without extradition papers."

"Wait here," Viglin said. "I'll get them." He examined his wrist watch carefully, muttered something about a half-hour gap, and pressed a button on the Traveler. Immediately, he was gone.

The two policemen sat down on Eldridge's couch and proceeded to ogle the Gauguins.

Eldridge tried to think, to plan, to anticipate. Impossible. He could not believe it. He refused to believe it. No one could make him believe—

"Imagine a famous guy like this being a crook," one of the policemen said.

"All geniuses are crazy," the other philosophized. "Remember the stuggie dancer who killed the girl? *He* was a genius, the readies said."

"Yeah." The first policeman lighted a cigar and tossed the burned match on Eldridge's shaggy little red rug.

ALL right, Eldridge decided, it was true. Under the circumstances, he had to believe. Nor was it so absurd. He had always suspected that he might be a genius.

But what had happened?

*In 1962, he would invent a time machine.*

Logical enough, since he was a genius.

*And he would travel through the three sectors of Civilized Time.*

Well, certainly, assuming he had a time machine. If there were three sectors, he would explore them.

He might even explore the uncivilized sectors.

*And then, without warning, he became a thief . . .*

No! He could accept everything else, but that was completely out of character. Eldridge was an intensely honest young man, quite above even petty dishonesties. As a student, he had never cheated at exams. As a man, he always paid his true and proper income tax, down to the last penny.

And it went deeper than that. Eldridge had no power drive, no urge for possessions. His desire had always been to settle in some warm, drowsy country, content with his books and music, sunshine, congenial neighbors, the love of a good woman.



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So he was accused of theft. Even if he were guilty, what conceivable motive could have prompted the action?

What had happened to him in the future?

"You going to the scrug rally?" one of the cops asked the other.

"Why not? It comes on Malm Sunday, doesn't it?"

They didn't care. When Viglin returned, they would handcuff him and drag him to Sector One of the future. He would be sentenced and thrown into a cell.

All for a crime he was *going* to commit.

He made a swift decision and acted on it quickly.

"I feel faint," he said, and began to topple out of his chair.

"Look out—he may have a gun!" one of the policemen yelped.

They rushed over to him, leaving their time machine on the couch.

Eldridge scuttled around the other side of the desk and pounced on the machine. Even in his haste, he realized that Sector One would be an unhealthy place for him. So, as the policemen sprinted across the room, he pushed the button marked Sector Two.

Instantly, he was plunged into darkness.

WHEN he opened his eyes, Eldridge found that he was standing ankle-deep in a pool of dirty water. He was in a field, twenty feet from a road. The air was warm and moist. The Time Traveler was clasped tightly under his arm.

He was in Sector Two of the future and it didn't thrill him a bit.

He walked to the road. On either side of it were terraced fields, filled with the green stalks of rice plants.

Rice? In New York State? Eldridge remembered that in his own time sector, a climatic shift had been detected. It was predicted that someday the temperate zones would be hot, perhaps tropical. This future seemed to prove the theory. He was perspiring already. The ground was damp, as though from a recent rain, and the sky was an intense, unclouded blue.

But where were the farmers? Squinting at the Sun directly overhead, he had the answer.

At siesta, of course.

Looking down the road, he could see buildings half a mile away. He scraped mud from his shoes and started walking.

But what would he do when he reached the buildings? How could he discover what had happened to him in Sector One? He couldn't walk up to someone



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and say, "Excuse me, sir. I'm from 1954, a year you may have heard about. It seems that in some way or—"

No, that would never do.

He would think of something. Eldridge continued walking, while the Sun beat down fiercely upon him. He shifted the Traveler to his other arm, then looked at it closely. Since he was going to invent it—no, already had—he'd better find out how it worked.

On its face were buttons for the first three sectors of Civilized Time. There was a special dial for journeying past Sector Three, into the Uncivilized Sectors. In on corner was a metal plate, which read: CAUTION: *Allow at least one half-hour between time jumps, to avoid cancellation.*

That didn't tell him much. He opened the back. Inside, there was a regulator set at marking 2, and locked. Why? He didn't know. All the components were unfamiliar to him. The only thing he recognized were the batteries, which were of a type he had never seen. Their power rating was almost unbelievable.

It would have to be, he decided. Time Travel must use up a lot of juice.

He closed the machine again. According to Viglin, it had taken Eldridge eight years—from 1954 to 1962—to invent the Traveler. He would need more than a few minutes to understand it.

ELDRIDGE reached the buildings and found that he was in a good-sized town. A few people were on the streets, walking slowly under the tropical Sun. They were dressed entirely in white. He was pleased to see that styles in Section Two were so conservative that his suit could pass for a rustic version of their dress.

He passed a large adobe building. The sign in front read: PUBLIC READERY.

A library. Eldridge stopped. Within would undoubtedly be the records of the past few hundred years. There would be an account of his crime—if any—and the circumstances under which he had committed it.

But would he be safe? Were there any circulars out for his arrest? Was there an extradition between Sectors One and Two?

He would have to chance it. Eldridge entered, walked quickly past the thin, gray-faced librarian, and into the stacks.

There was a large section on Time, but the most thorough one-volume treatment was a book called *Origins of Time Travel* by Ricardo Alfredex. The first part told how the young genius Eldridge had, one fateful day in 1954, received the



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germ of the idea from the controversial Holstead equations. The formula was really absurdly simple—Alfredex quoted the main propositions—but no one ever had realized it before. Eldridge's genius lay chiefly in perceiving the obvious.

Eldridge frowned at this disparagement. Obvious, was it? He still didn't understand it. And *he* was the inventor!

By 1962, the machine had been built. It worked on the very first trial, catapulting its young inventor into what became known as Sector One.

Eldridge looked up and found that a bespectacled girl of nine or so was standing at the end of his row of books, staring at him. She ducked back out of sight. He read on.

The next chapter was entitled "Unparadox of Time." Eldridge skimmed it rapidly. The author began with the classic paradox of Achilles and the tortoise, and demolished it with integral calculus. Using this as a logical foundation, he went on to the so-called time paradoxes—killing one's great-great grandfather, meeting oneself, and the like. These held up no better than Zeno's ancient paradox. Alfredex went on to explain that all temporal paradoxes were the inventions of authors with a gift for confusion.

Eldridge didn't understand the intricate symbolic logic in this part, which was embarrassing, since *he* was cited as the leading authority.

THE next chapter was called "Fall of the Mighty." It told how Eldridge had met Viglin, the owner of a large sporting-goods store in Sector One. They became fast friends. The businessman took the shy young genius under his wing. He arranged lecture tours for him. Then—

"I beg your pardon, sir," someone said. Eldridge looked up. The gray-faced librarian was standing in front of him. Beside her was the bespectacled little girl with a smug grin on her face.

"Yes?" Eldridge asked.

"Time Travelers are not allowed in the Readery," the librarian said sternly.

That was understandable, Eldridge thought. Travelers could grab an armload of valuable books and disappear. They probably weren't allowed in banks, either.

The trouble was, he didn't dare surrender this book.

Eldridge smiled, tapped his ear, and hastily went on reading.

It seemed that the brilliant young Eldridge had allowed Viglin to arrange all his con-



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tracts and papers. One day he found, to his surprise, that he had signed over all rights in the Time Traveler to Viglin, for a small monetary consideration. Eldridge brought the case to court. The court found against him. The case was appealed. Penniless and embittered, Eldridge embarked on his career of crime, stealing from Viglin—

"Sir!" the librarian said. "Deaf or not, you must leave at once. Otherwise I will call a guard."

Eldridge put down the book, muttered, "Tattle-tale," to the little girl, and hurried out of the Readery.

Now he knew why Viglin was so eager to arrest him. With the case still pending, Eldridge would be in a very poor position behind bars.

But why had he stolen?

The theft of his invention was an understandable motive, but Eldridge felt certain it was not the right one. Stealing from Viglin would not make him feel any better nor would it right the wrong. His reaction would be either to fight or to withdraw, to retire from the whole mess. Anything except stealing.

Well, he would find out. He would hide in Sector Two, perhaps find work. Bit by bit, he would—

Two men seized his arms from either side. A third took the Traveler away from him. It was done so smoothly that Eldridge was still gasping when one of the men showed a badge.

"Police," the man said. "You'll have to come with us, Mr. Eldridge."

"What for?" Eldridge asked.

"Robbery in Sectors One and Two."

So he had stolen here, too.

HE was taken to the police station and into the small, cluttered office of the Captain of Police. The Captain was a slim, balding, cheerful-faced man. He waved his subordinates out of the room, motioned Eldridge to a chair and gave him a cigarette.

"So you're Eldridge," he said.

Eldridge nodded morosely.

"Been reading about you ever since I was a little boy," the Captain said nostalgically. "You were one of my heroes."

Eldridge guessed the Captain to be a good fifteen years his senior, but he didn't ask about it. After all, *he* was supposed to be the expert on time paradoxes.

"Always thought you got a rotten deal," the Captain said, toying with a large bronze paperweight. "Still, I couldn't understand a man like you stealing. For a while, we thought it might have been temporary insanity."



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"Was it?" Eldridge asked hopefully.

"Not a chance. Checked your records. You just haven't got the potentiality. And that makes it rather difficult for me. For example, why did you steal *those* particular items?"

"What items?"

"Don't you remember?"

"I—I've blanked out," Eldridge said. "Temporary amnesia."

"Very understandable," the Captain said sympathetically. He handed Eldridge a paper. "Here's the list."

ITEMS STOLEN BY
THOMAS MONROE ELDRIDGE

| | Credits |
|---|---|
| *Taken from Viglin's Sporting Goods Store, Sector One:* | |
| 4 Megacharge Hand Pistols | 10,000 |
| 3 Lifebelts, Inflatable | 100 |
| 5 Cans, Ollen's Shark Repellent | 400 |
| *Taken from Altghan's Specialty Shop, Sector One:* | |
| 2 Microflex Sets, World Literature | 1,000 |
| 5 Teeny-Tom Symphonic Tape Runs | 2,650 |
| *Taken from Loorie's Produce Store, Sector Two:* | |
| 4 Dozen Potatoes, White Turtle Brand | 5 |
| 9 Packages, Carrot Seeds (Fancy) | 6 |
| *Taken from Manori's Notions Store, Sector Two:* | |
| 5 Dozen Mirrors, Silver-backed (hand size) | 95 |
| Total Value | 14,256 |

"What does it mean?" the Captain asked. "Stealing a million credits outright, I could understand, but why all that junk?"

Eldridge shook his head. He could find nothing meaningful in the list. The megacharge hand pistols sounded useful. But why the mirrors, lifebelts, potatoes and the rest of the things that the Captain had properly called junk?

It just didn't sound like himself. Eldridge began to think of himself as two people. Eldridge I had invented time travel, been victimized, stolen some incomprehensible articles, and vanished. Eldridge II was himself, the person Viglin had found. He had no memory of the first Eldridge. But he had to discover Eldridge I's motives and/or suffer for his crimes.

It was all very confusing.

"What happened after I stole these things?" Eldridge asked.

"That's what we'd like to know," the Captain said. "All we know is, you fled into Sector Three with your loot."

"And then?"

THE Captain shrugged. "When we applied for extradition, the authorities told us you weren't there. Not that they'd have given you up. They're a proud, independent sort, you



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know. Anyhow, you'd vanished."

"Vanished? To where?"

"I don't know. You might have gone into the Uncivilized Sectors that lie beyond Sector Three."

"What are the Uncivilized Sectors?" Eldridge asked.

"We were hoping you would tell us," the Captain said. "You're the only man who's explored beyond Sector Three."

Damn it, Eldridge thought, he was supposed to be the authority on everything he wanted to know!

"THIS puts me in a pretty fix," the Captain remarked squinting at his paperweight.

"Why?"

"Well, you're a thief. The law says I must arrest you. However, I am also aware that you got a very shoddy deal. And I happen to know that you stole only from Viglin and his affiliates in both Sectors. There's a certain justice to it—unfortunately unrecognized by law."

Eldridge nodded unhappily.

"It's my clear duty to arrest you," the Captain said with a deep sigh. "There's nothing I can do about it, even if I wanted to. You'll have to stand trial and probably serve a sentence of twenty years or so."

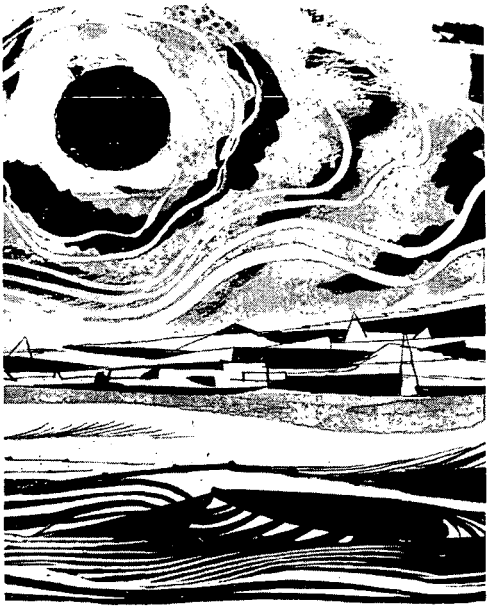
"*What?* For stealing rubbish like shark repellent and carrot seed? For stealing *junk?*"

"We're pretty rough on time theft," said the Captain. "Temporal offense."

"I see," Eldridge said, slumping in his chair.

"Of course," said the Captain thoughtfully, "if you should suddenly turn vicious, knock me over the head with this heavy paperweight, grab my personal Time Traveler—which I keep in the second shelf of that cabinet—and return to your friends in Sector Three, there would really be nothing I could do about it."

"Huh?"





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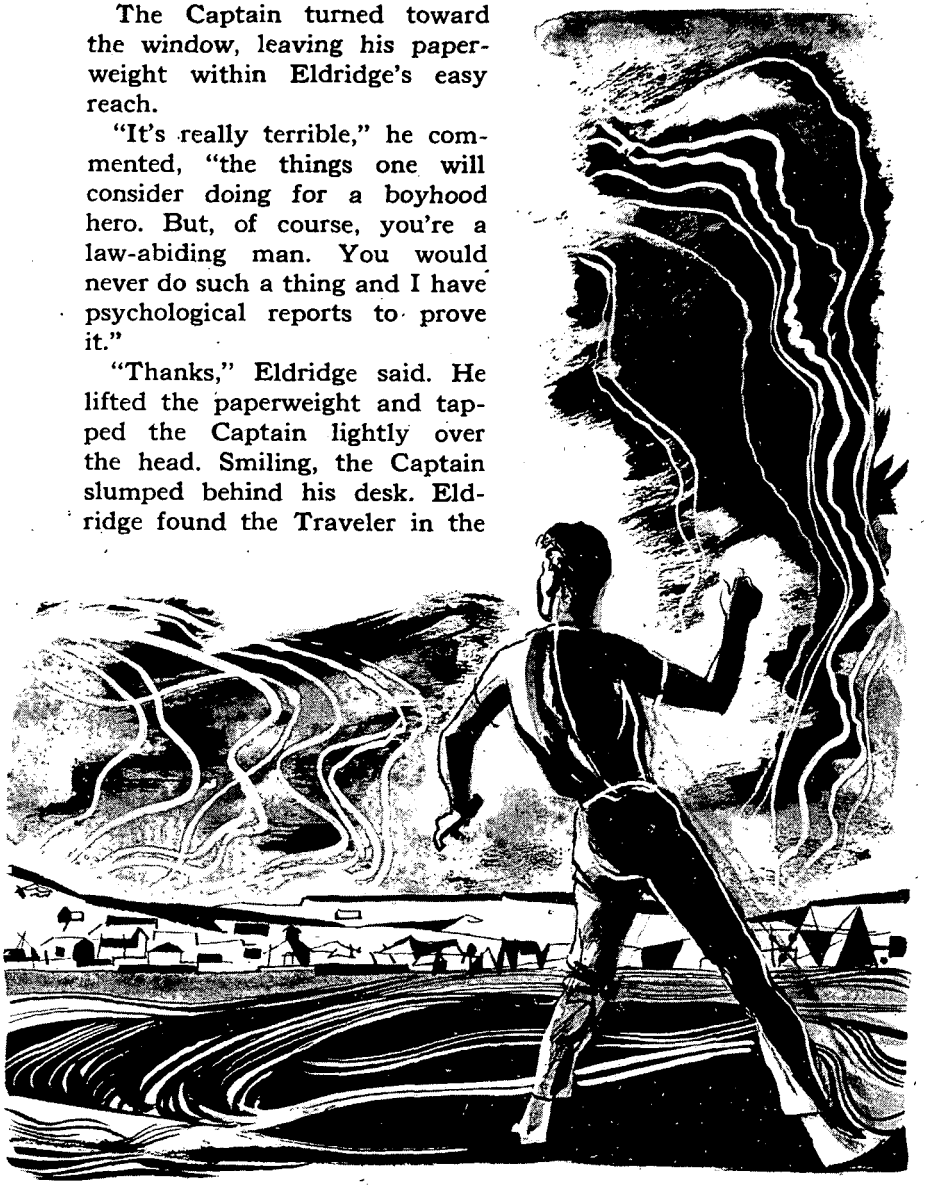
The Captain turned toward the window, leaving his paperweight within Eldridge's easy reach.

"It's really terrible," he commented, "the things one will consider doing for a boyhood hero. But, of course, you're a law-abiding man. You would never do such a thing and I have psychological reports to prove it."

"Thanks," Eldridge said. He lifted the paperweight and tapped the Captain lightly over the head. Smiling, the Captain slumped behind his desk. Eldridge found the Traveler in the





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cabinet and set it for Sector Three. He sighed deeply and pushed the button.

Again he was overcome by darkness.

WHEN he opened his eyes, he was standing on a plain of parched yellow ground. Around him stretched a treeless waste, and a dusty wind blew in his face. Ahead, he could see several brick buildings and a row of tents, built along the side of a dried-out gully. He walked toward them.

This future, he decided, must have seen another climatic shift. The fierce Sun had baked the land, drying up the streams and rivers. If the trend continued, he could understand why the next future was Uncivilized. It was probably Unpopulated.

He was very tired. He had not eaten all day—or for several thousand years, depending on how you count. But that, he realized, was a false paradox, one that Alfredex would certainly demolish with symbolic logic.

To hell with logic. To hell with science, paradox, everything. He would run no further. There had to be room for him in this dusty land. The people here—a proud, independent sort—would not give him up. They believed in Justice, not the Law. Here he would stay, work, grow old, and forget Eldridge I and his crazy schemes.

When he reached the village, he saw that the people were already assembled to greet him. They were dressed in long, flowing robes, like Arabian burnooses, the only logical attire for the climate.

A bearded patriarch stepped forward and nodded gravely at Eldridge. "The ancient sayings are true. For every beginning there is an ending."

Eldridge agreed politely. "Anyone got a drink of water?" he asked.

"It is truly written," the patriarch continued, "that the thief, given a universe to wander, will ultimately return to the scene of his crime."

"Crime?" Eldridge asked, feeling an uneasy tingle in his stomach.

"Crime," the patriarch repeated.

A man in the crowd shouted, "It's a stupid bird that fouls its own nest!" The people roared with laughter, but Eldridge didn't like the sound. It was cruel laughter.

"Ingratitude breeds betrayal," the patriarch said. "Evil is omnipresent. We liked you, Thomas Eldridge. You came to us with your strange machine, bearing booty, and we recognized your



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proud spirit. It made you one of us. We protected you from your enemies in the Wet Worlds. What did it matter to us if you had wronged them? Had they not wronged you? An eye for an eye!"

The crowd growled approvingly.

"But what did I do?" Eldridge wanted to know.

The crowd converged on him, waving clubs and knives. A row of men in dark blue cloaks held them off, and Eldridge realized that there were policemen even here.

"Tell me what I did," he persisted as the policemen took the Traveler from him.

"As though you didn't know!" the patriarch said.

"For God's sake, tell me what I did!"

"You are guilty of sabotage and murder," the patriarch told him.

ELDRIDGE stared around wildly. He had fled a petty larceny charge in Sector One, only to find himself accused of it in Sector Two. He had retreated to Sector Three, where he was wanted for murder and sabotage.

He smiled amiably. "You know, all I ever really wanted was a warm drowsy country, books, congenial neighbors, and the love of a good—"

When he recovered, he found himself lying on packed earth in a small brick jail. Through a slitted window, he could see an insignificant strip of sunset. Outside the wooden door, someone was wailing a song.

He found a bowl of food beside him and wolfed down the unfamiliar stuff. After drinking some water from another bowl, he propped himself against the wall. Through his narrow window, the sunset was fading. In the courtyard, a gang of men was erecting a gallows.

"Jailor!" Eldridge shouted.

In a few moments, he heard the clump of footsteps.

"I need a lawyer," he said.

"We have no lawyers here," the man replied proudly. "Here we have justice." He marched off.

Eldridge began to revise his ideas about justice without law. It was very good as an idea—but a horror as reality.

He lay on the floor and tried to think. No thoughts came. He could hear the workmen laughing and joking as they built the gallows. They worked late into the twilight.

In the early evening, Eldridge heard the key turn in his lock. Two men entered. One was middle-aged, with a small, well-trimmed beard. The other was about Eldridge's age, broad-shouldered and deeply tanned.

"Do you remember me?" the



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middle-aged man asked.

"Should I?"

"You should. I was her father."

"And I was her fiancé," the young man said. He took a threatening step forward.

The bearded man restrained him. "I know how you feel, Morgel, but he will pay for his crimes on the gallows."

"Hanging is too good for him, Mr. Becker," Morgel argued. "He should be drawn, quartered, burned and scattered to the wind."

"Yes, but we are a just and merciful people," Becker said virtuously.

"Whose father?" Eldridge asked. "Whose fiancé?"

The two men looked at each other.

"What did I do?" Eldridge asked.

Becker told him.

HE had come to them from Sector Two, loaded with loot, Becker explained. The people of Sector Three accepted him. They were a simple folk, direct and quick-tempered, the inheritors of a wasted, war-torn Earth. In Sector Three, the minerals were gone, the soil had lost its fertility. Huge tracts of land were radioactive. And the Sun continued to beat down, the glaciers melted, and the oceans continued to rise.

The men of Sector Three were struggling back to civilization. They had the rudiments of a manufacturing system and a few power installations. Eldridge had increased the output of these stations, given them a lighting system, and taught them the rudiments of sanitary processing. He continued his explorations into the Unexplored Sectors beyond Sector Three. He became a popular hero and the people of Sector Three loved and protected him.

Eldridge had repaid this kindness by abducting Becker's daughter.

This attractive young lady had been engaged to Morgel. Preparations were made for her marriage. Eldridge ignored all this and showed his true nature by kidnapping her one dark night and placing her in an infernal machine of his own making. When he turned the invention on, the girl vanished. The overloaded power lines blew out every installation for miles around.

Murder and sabotage!

But the irate mob had not been able to reach Eldridge in time. He had stuffed some of his loot into a knapsack, grabbed his Traveler and vanished.

"I did all that?" Eldridge gasped.

"Before witnesses," Becker said. "Your remaining loot is in the warehouse. We could deduce nothing from it."



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With both men staring him full in the face, Eldridge looked at the ground.

Now he knew what he had done in Sector Three.

The murder charge was probably false, though. Apparently he had built a heavy-duty Traveler and sent the girl somewhere, without the intermediate stops required by the portable models. Not that anyone would believe him. These people had never heard of such a civilized concept as *habeas corpus*.

"Why did you do it?" Becker asked.

Eldridge shrugged his shoulders and shook his head helplessly.

"Didn't I treat you like my own son? Didn't I turn back the police of Sector Two? Didn't I feed you, clothe you? Why—*why*—did you do it?"

All Eldridge could do was shrug his shoulders and go on helplessly shaking his head.

"Very well," Becker said. "Tell your secret to the hangman in the morning."

He took Morgel by the arm and left.

IF Eldridge had had a gun, he might have shot himself on the spot. All the evidence pointed to potentialities for evil in him that he had never suspected. He was running out of time. In the morning, he would hang.

And it was unfair, all of it. He was an innocent bystander, continually running into the consequences of his former—or later—actions. But only Eldridge I possessed the motives and knew the answers.

Even if his thefts were justified, why had he stolen potatoes, lifebelts, mirrors and such?

What had he done with the girl?

What was he trying to accomplish?

Wearily, Eldridge closed his eyes and drifted into a troubled half-sleep.

He heard a faint scraping noise and looked up.

Viglin was standing there, a Traveler in his hands.

Eldridge was too tired to be very surprised. He looked for a moment, then said, "Come for one last gloat?"

"I didn't plan it this way," Viglin protested, mopping his perspiring face. "You must believe that. I never wanted you killed, Tom."

Eldridge sat up and looked closely at Viglin. "You did steal my invention, didn't you?"

"Yes," Viglin confessed. "But I was going to do the right thing by you. I would have split the profits."

"Then why did you steal it?"

Viglin looked uncomfortable.



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"You weren't interested in money at all."

"So you tricked me into signing over my rights?"

"If I hadn't, someone else would have, Tom. I was just saving you from your own unworldliness. I intended to cut you in—I swear it!" He wiped his forehead again. "But I never dreamed it would turn out like this."

"And then you framed me for those thefts," Eldridge said. The thing was making sense now.

"What?" Viglin appeared to be genuinely surprised. "No, Tom. You *did* steal those things. It worked out perfectly for me—until now."

"You're lying!"

"Would I come here to lie? I've admitted stealing your invention. Why would I lie about anything else?"

"Then why did I steal?"

"I think you had some sort of wild scheme in the Uninhabited Sectors, but I don't really know. It doesn't matter. Listen to me now. There's no way I can call off the lawsuit—it's a temporal matter now—but I can get you out of here."

"Where will I go?" Eldridge asked hopelessly. "The cops are looking for me all through time."

"I'll hide you on my estate. I mean it. You can lie low until the statute of limitations has expired. They'd never think of searching my place for you."

"And the rights on my invention?"

"I'm keeping them," Viglin said, with a touch of his former confidence. "I can't turn them over to you without making myself liable for temporal action. But I *will* share them. And you *do* need a business partner."

"All right, let's get out of here," Eldridge said.

VIGLIN had brought along a number of tools, which he handled with suspicious proficiency. Within minutes, they were out of the cell and hiding in the dark courtyard.

"This Traveler's pretty weak," Viglin whispered, checking the batteries in his machine. "Could we possibly get yours?"

"It should be in the storehouse," Eldridge said.

The storehouse was unguarded and Viglin made short work of the lock. Inside, they found Eldridge II's machine beside Eldridge I's preposterous, bewildering loot.

"Let's go," Viglin said.

Eldridge shook his head.

"What's wrong?" asked Viglin, annoyed.

"I'm not going."

"Listen, Tom, I know there's no reason why you should trust me. But I really will give you



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sanctuary. I'm not lying to you."

"I believe you," Eldridge said. "Just the same, I'm not going back."

"What are you planning to do?"

Eldridge had been wondering about that ever since they had broken out of the cell. He was at the crossroads now. He could return with Viglin or he could go on alone.

There was no choice, really. He had to assume that he had known what he was doing the first time. Right or wrong, he was going to keep faith and meet whatever appointments he had made with the future.

"I'm going into the Uninhabited Sectors," Eldridge said. He found a sack and began loading it with potatoes and carrot seeds.

"You can't!" Viglin objected. "The first time, you ended up in 1954. You might not be so lucky this time. You might be canceled out completely."

Eldridge had loaded all the potatoes and the packages of carrot seeds. Next he slipped in the World Literature Sets, the lifebelts, the cans of shark repellent and the mirrors. On top of this he put the megacharge hand pistols.

"Have you any idea what you're going to do with that stuff?"

"Not the slightest," Eldridge said, buttoning the Symphonic Tape Runs inside his shirt. "But they must fit somewhere."

Viglin sighed heavily. "Don't forget, you have to allow half an hour between jumps or you'll get canceled. Have you got a watch?"

"No, I left it in my room."

"Take this one. Sportsman's Special." Viglin attached it to Eldridge's wrist. "Good luck, Tom. I mean that."

"Thanks."

Eldridge set the button for the farthest jump into the future he could make. He grinned at Viglin and pushed the button.

There was the usual moment of blackness, then a sudden icy shock. When Eldridge opened his eyes, he found that he was under water.

HE found his way to the surface, struggling against the weight of the sack. Once his head was above water, he looked around for the nearest land.

There was no land. Long, smooth-backed waves slid toward him from the limitless horizon, lifted him and ran on, toward a hidden shore.

Eldridge fumbled in his sack, found the lifebelts and inflated them. Soon he was bobbing on the surface, trying to figure out what had happened to New York State.



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Each jump into the future had brought him to a hotter climate. Here, countless thousands of years past 1954, the glaciers must have melted. A good part of the Earth was probably submerged.

He had planned well in taking the lifebelts. It gave him confidence for the rest of the journey. Now he would just have to float for half an hour, to avoid cancellation.

He leaned back, supported by the lifebelts, and admired the cloud formations in the sky.

Something brushed against him.

Eldridge looked down and saw a long black shape glide under his feet. Another joined it and they began to move hungrily toward him.

Sharks!

He fumbled wildly with the sack, spilling out the mirrors in his hurry, and found a can of shark repellent. He opened it, spilled it overboard, and an orange blotch began to spread on the blue-black water.

There were three sharks now. They swam warily around the spreading circle of repellent. A fourth joined them, lunged into the orange smear, and retreated quickly to clean water.



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Eldridge was glad the future had produced a shark repellent that really worked.

In five minutes, some of the orange had dissipated. He opened another can. The sharks didn't give up hope, but they wouldn't swim into the tainted water. He emptied the cans every five minutes. The stalemate held through Eldridge's half-hour wait.

He checked his settings and tightened his grip on the sack. He didn't know what the mirrors or potatoes were for, or why carrot seeds were critical. He would just have to take his chances.

He pressed the button and went into the familiar darkness.

He found himself ankle-deep in a thick, evil-smelling bog. The heat was stifling and a cloud of huge gnats buzzed around his head.

PULLING himself out of the gluey mud, accompanied by the hiss and click of unseen life, Eldridge found firmer footing under a small tree. Around him was green jungle, shot through with riotous purples and reds.

Eldridge settled against the tree to wait out his half hour. In this future, apparently, the ocean



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waters had receded and the primeval jungle had sprung up. Were there any humans here? Were there any left on Earth? He wasn't at all sure. It looked as though the world was starting over.

Eldridge heard a bleating noise and saw a dull green shape move against the brighter green of the foliage. Something was coming toward him.

He watched. It was about twelve feet tall, with a lizard's wrinkled hide and wide splay feet. It looked amazingly like a small dinosaur.

Eldridge watched the big reptile warily. Most dinosaurs were herbivorous, he reminded himself, especially the ones that lived in swamps. This one probably just wanted to sniff him. Then it would return to cropping grass.

The dinosaur yawned, revealing a magnificent set of pointed teeth, and began to approach Eldridge with an air of determination.

Eldridge dipped into the sack, pushed irrelevant items out of the way, and grabbed a megacharge hand pistol.

This had better be it, he prayed, and fired.

The dinosaur vanished in a spray of smoke. There were only a few shreds of flesh and a smell of ozone to show where it had been. Eldridge looked at the megacharge hand pistol with new respect. Now he understood why it was so expensive.

During the next half hour, a number of jungle inhabitants took a lively interest in him. Each pistol was good for only a few firings—no surprise, considering their destructiveness. His last one began to lose its charge; he had to club off a pterodactyl with the butt.

When the half hour was over, he set the dial again, wishing he knew what lay ahead. He wondered how he was supposed to face new dangers with some books, potatoes, carrot seeds and mirrors.

Perhaps there were no dangers ahead.

There was only one way to find out. He pressed the button.

HE was on a grassy hillside. The dense jungle had disappeared. Now there was a breeze-swept pine forest stretching before him, solid ground underfoot, and a temperate sun in the sky.

Eldridge's pulse quickened at the thought that *this* might be his goal. He had always had an atavistic streak, a desire to find a place untouched by civilization. The embittered Eldridge I, robbed and betrayed, must have felt it even more strongly.

It was a little disappointing. Still, it wasn't too bad, he decid-



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ed. Except for the loneliness. If only there were people—

A man stepped out of the forest. He was less than five feet tall, thick-set, muscled like a wrestler and wearing a fur kilt. His skin was colored a medium gray. He carried a ragged tree limb, roughly shaped into a club.

Two dozen others came through the forest behind him. They marched directly up to Eldridge.

"Hello, fellows," Eldridge said pleasantly.

The leader replied in a guttural language and made a gesture with his open palm.

"I bring your crops blessings," Eldridge said promptly. "I've got just what you need." He reached into his sack and held up a package of carrot seeds. "Seeds! You'll advance a thousand years in civilization—"

The leader grunted angrily and his followers began to circle Eldridge. They held out their hands, palms up, grunting excitedly.

They didn't want the sack and they refused the discharged hand pistol. They had him almost completely circled now. Clubs were being hefted and he still had no idea what they wanted.

"Potato?" he asked in desperation.

They didn't want potatoes, either.

His time machine had two minutes more to wait. He turned and ran.

The savages were after him at once. Eldridge sprinted into the forest like a grayhound, dodging through the closely packed trees. Several clubs whizzed past him.

One minute to go.

He tripped over a root, scrambled to his feet and kept on running. The savages were close on his heels.

Ten seconds. Five seconds. A club glanced off his shoulder.

Time! He reached for the button—and a club thudded against his head, knocking him to the ground. When he could focus again, the leader of the savages was standing over his Time Traveler, club raised.

"Don't!" Eldridge yelled in panic.

But the leader grinned wildly and brought down the club. In a few seconds, he had reduced the machine to scrap metal.

ELDRIDGE was dragged into a cave, cursing hopelessly. Two savages guarded the entrance. Outside, he could see a gang of men gathering wood. Women and children were scampering back and forth, laden down with clay containers. To judge by their laughter, they were planning a feast.

Eldridge realized, with a sink-



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ing sensation, that he would be the main dish.

Not that it mattered. They had destroyed his Traveler. No Viglin would rescue him this time. He was at the end of his road.

Eldridge didn't want to die. But what made it worse was the thought of dying without ever finding out what Eldridge I had planned.

It seemed unfair, somehow.

For several minutes, he sat in abject self-pity. Then he crawled farther back into the cave, hoping to find another way out.

The cave ended abruptly against a wall of granite. But he found something else.

An old shoe.

He picked it up and stared at it. For some reason, it bothered him, although it was a perfectly ordinary brown leather shoe, just like the ones he had on.

Then the anachronism struck him.

*What was a manufactured article like a shoe doing back in this dawn age?*

He looked at the size and quickly tried it on. It fitted him exactly, which made the answer obvious—he must have passed through here on his first trip.

But why had he left a shoe?

There was something inside, too soft to be a pebble, too stiff to be a piece of torn lining. He took off the shoe and found a piece of paper wadded in the toe. He unfolded it and read in his own handwriting:

**Silliest damned business—how do you address yourself? "Dear Eldridge"? All right, let's forget the salutation; you'll read this because I already have, and so, naturally, I'm writing it, otherwise you wouldn't be able to read it, nor would I have been.**

**Look, you're in a rough spot. Don't worry about it, though. You'll come out of it in one piece. I'm leaving you a Time Traveler to take you where you have to go next.**

**The question is: where do I go? I'm deliberately setting the Traveler before the half-hour lag it needs, knowing there will be a cancellation effect. That means the Traveler will stay here for you to use. But what happens to me?**

**I think I know. Still, it scares me—this is the first cancellation I'll have experienced. But worrying about it is nonsensical; I *know* it has to turn out right because there are no time paradoxes.**

**Well, here goes. I'll push the button and cancel. Then the machine is yours.**

**Wish me luck.**

WISH *him* luck! Eldridge savagely tore up the note and threw it away.

But Eldridge I had purposely canceled and been swept back to the future, which meant that the Traveler hadn't gone back with him! It must still be here!

Eldridge began a frantic search of the cave. If he could just find it and push the button, he could go on ahead. It *had* to be here!



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Several hours later, when the guards dragged him out, he still hadn't found it.

The entire village had gathered and they were in a festive mood. The clay containers were being passed freely and two or three men had already passed out. But the guards who led Eldridge forward were sober enough.

They carried him to a wide, shallow pit. In the center of it was what looked like a sacrificial altar. It was decorated with wild colors and heaped around it was an enormous pile of dried branches.

Eldridge was pushed in and the dancing began.

He tried several times to scramble out, but was prodded back each time. The dancing continued for hours, until the last dancer had collapsed, exhausted.

An old man approached the rim of the pit, holding a lighted torch. He gestured with it and threw it into the pit.

Eldridge stamped it out. But more torches rained down, lighting the outermost branches. They flared brightly and he was forced to retreat inward, toward the altar.

The flaming circle closed, driving him back. At last, panting, eyes burning, legs buckling, he fell across the altar as the flames licked at him.

His eyes were closed and he gripped the knobs tightly—

*Knobs?*

He looked. Under its gaudy decoration, the altar was a Time Traveler—the same Traveler, past a doubt, that Eldridge I had brought here and left for him. When Eldridge I vanished, they must have venerated it as a sacred object.

And it *did* have magical qualities.

The fire was singeing his feet when he adjusted the regulator. With his finger against the button, he hesitated.

What would the future hold for him? All he had in the way of equipment was a sack of carrot seeds, potatoes, the symphonic runs, the microfilm volumes of world literature and small mirrors.

But he had come this far. He would see the end.

He pressed the button.

OPENING his eyes, Eldridge found that he was standing on a beach. Water was lapping at his toes and he could hear the boom of breakers.

The beach was long and narrow and dazzingly white. In front of him, a blue ocean stretched to infinity. Behind him, at the edge of the beach, was a row of palms. Growing among them was the brilliant vegetation of a tropical island.



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He heard a shout.

Eldridge looked around for something to defend himself with. He had nothing, nothing at all. He was defenseless.

Men came running from the jungle toward him. They were shouting something strange. He listened carefully.

"Welcome! Welcome back!" they called out.

A gigantic brown man enclosed him in a bearlike hug. "You have returned!" he exclaimed.

"Why—yes," Eldridge said.

More people were running down to the beach. They were a comely race. The men were tall and tanned, and the women, for the most part, were slim and pretty. They looked like the sort of people one would like to have for neighbors.

"Did you bring them?" a thin old man asked, panting from his run to the beach.

"Bring what?"

"The carrot seeds. You promised to bring them. And the potatoes."

Eldridge dug them out of his pockets. "Here they are," he said.

"Thank you. Do you really think they'll grow in this climate? I suppose we could construct a—"

"Later, later," the big man interrupted. "You must be tired."

Eldridge thought back to what had happened since he had last awakened, back in 1954. Subjectively, it was only a day or so, but it had covered thousands of years back and forth and was crammed with arrests, escapes, dangers and bewildering puzzles.

"Tired," he said. "Very."

"Perhaps you'd like to return to your own home?"

"My own?"

"Certainly. The house you built facing the lagoon. Don't you remember?"

Eldridge smiled feebly and shook his head.

"He doesn't remember!" the man cried.

"You don't remember our chess games?" another man asked.

"And the fishing parties?" a boy put in.

"Or the picnics and celebrations?"

"The dances?"

"And the sailing?"

ELDRIDGE shook his head at each eager, worried question.

"All this was before you went back to your own time," the big man told him.

"Went back?" asked Eldridge. Here was everything he had always wanted. Peace, contentment, warm climate, good neighbors. He felt inside the sack and his shirt. And books and music, he mentally added to the list.



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Good Lord, no one in his right mind would leave a place like this! And that brought up an important question. "Why did I leave here?"

"Surely you remember *that!*" the big man said.

"I'm afraid not."

A slim, light-haired girl stepped forward. "You really don't remember coming back for me?"

Eldridge stared at her. "You must be Becker's daughter. The girl who was engaged to Morgel. The one I kidnapped."

"Morgel only *thought* he was engaged to me," she said. "And you didn't kidnap me. I came of my own free will."

"Oh, I see," Eldridge answered, feeling like an idiot. "I mean I think I see. That is—pleased to meet you," he finished inanely.

"You needn't be so formal," she said. "After all, we *are* married. And you *did* bring me a mirror, didn't you?"

It was complete now. Eldridge grinned, took out a mirror, gave it to her, and handed the sack to the big man. Delighted, she did the things with her eyebrows and hair that women always do whenever they see their reflections.

"Let's go home, dear," she said.

He didn't know her name, but he liked her looks. He liked her very much. But that was only natural.

"I'm afraid I can't right now," he replied, looking at his watch. The half hour was almost up. "I have something to do first. But I should be back in a very little while."

She smiled sunnily. "I won't worry. You said you would return and you did. And you brought back the mirrors and seed and potatoes that you told us you'd bring."

She kissed him. He shook hands all around. In a way, that symbolized the full cycle Alfredex had used to demolish the foolish concept of temporal paradoxes.

The familiar darkness swallowed Eldridge as he pushed the button on the Traveler.

He had ceased being Eldridge II.

From this point on, he was Eldridge I and he knew precisely where he was going, what he would do and the things he needed to do them. They all led to this goal and this girl, for there was no question that he would come back here and live out his life with her, their good neighbors, books and music, in peace and contentment.

It was wonderful, knowing that everything would turn out just as he had always dreamed.

He even had a feeling of affection and gratitude for Viglin and Alfredex.

—ROBERT SHECKLEY



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*One thing extraterrestrials can't know . . . that the horse always goes before the cart!*

# THIS SIDE UP

**By R. E. BANKS**

THE soft moon shone on the grass, on the white markers, on the rubble of the city and on the upstart tent town of the aliens.

It shone on the white hospital, most of which still remained standing.

It shone on the clean, youthful features of old Dr. Gan who, though a Thurkian, didn't consider himself an alien at all, so deeply had he studied Earth. It was early spring and the cold night air had a touch of life and warmth to it, a touch of wonder. This was the planet Earth, third planet from the sun of this solar system—

The miracle planet.

The only planet in all space whose beings had found immortality.

Dr. Gan was now moving across the birthgrounds of the Earthmen. Each birthplace was marked with white marble. On it was the baby's name, plus the allotted number of years he was to live before pregnating into immortality. He stooped to read one of them.

**Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS**



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**JESSE H. SMITH**
**1883-1953**
**R.I.P.**

Very clever and orderly of these Earthmen, to mark ahead of its birth how long each baby was to exist.

On the planet Thurkos, things were done much more haphazardly. Spontaneity was the curse of his species, thought Dr. Gan. They came into existence out of nowhere, spontaneously. They lived their lives and, when their time was up, their bodies vanished as strangely as they came, in a sudden disintegration of totality which left nothing behind.

EARTHMEN were smarter, Dr. Gan mused. They, too, came alive in spontaneity. Only instead of appearing full-bodied and naked on the streets, like the Thurkians, they appeared in boxes six feet long, three feet wide, buried six feet down in the ground. How wonderful it must have been to begin life so—having a plot of ground for your very own, wearing clothes, having a warm box to lie in! R.I.P.—that meant Ready - In - Place, come and get me—I'm ready to start life.

Then your Earth fellows came to these great birthplaces—pleasant, grassy places with many flowers—and dug you up. They took you to the great hospitals, like the one over there. They cleaned you up, assigned you to a family and you went home to begin life.

Like Thurkians, Earthmen were born with pseudo-teeth completely removable from the mouth, with face-wrinkles and bent bones. Then both races grew old, getting hair, getting white teeth, getting straighter, more powerful figures.

But the Thurkians shrank over the years, getting smaller and, ultimately, vanished without a trace, whereas the Earthmen were smarter. In their extreme old age, they also grew to be very tiny indeed. They wore white pants made out of a triangle of cloth and bobbed their heads and were carried in the arms of the family female.

Then they chose a certain female relative—curiously always female—and accompanied her to the hospital.

There they entered what was called a "Delivery Room" and *thus delivered themselves unto the woman.* They actually became a part of her and she went on living! Thus Earthmen went on living, and it was a strangely marvelous immortality.

To pregnate and become part of another, instead of simply dying—a glorious way to end old age!



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Now the Thurkians were going to attempt that same immortality, thought old Dr. Gan, walking rapidly across the birthyard of the Earthmen with the springy steps of his old age. Each day, his muscles grew stronger, his mind more alert in advanced age. Inside of ten years, he'd be old and tiny. Earthmen, oddly enough, called this stage of life "childhood." And then shortly after that period he'd simply vanish.

Unless this new pregnating system of Dr. Duk's worked.

He sighed, expelling the soft spring air. He was filled with wonder at the greatness of the Earthmen, at the fortunate landing of his people on this planet and at the glorious future they were now sure to find.

He himself was lucky to be here—after all the sins he had committed. Only the kindness of Dr. Duk . . .

He entered the hospital. It hummed with activity. Yesterday, the Princess of the People had landed—tomorrow, the first great pregnating experiment was to be performed.

He went directly to his workplace, the tiny room where the only existing Earthman lived.

GAN checked in and relieved Tok. Tok's eyes swam with the importance of these days as did those of everyone else. The Thurkians couldn't be wrong—cell for cell, organ for organ, they were almost exactly like Earthmen.

Put the two races together on a street and you couldn't tell them apart. And now the Thurkians were about to reach immortal life . . .

"How is he?"

"He is well," said Tok, nodding toward the last Earthman. "No special instructions, except to speed up the testing." Then Tok hurried out to pay homage to the Princess of the People, the lovely Aza, she of the form divine. She of . . .

Dr. Gan turned to his work with a sigh. No reason for a discredited scientist like himself to dream of her high person. He was a minor figure and would always remain so, alongside the great Dr. Duk.

The last Earthman lived in a magnificent machine designed by these superior Earth beings. He must have lived in this room for many years after the last of the Earthmen had gone, his wants cared for by the machine. The Thurkians had no name for the machine, but it was a metallic aid to respiration—a sort of metal lung.

One did not like to contemplate what the Earthmen had done to themselves to pulverize their



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planet so. But that was a matter apart from the great experiment. The Earthmen had left very little above the ground, so very little that it had taken a brain like that of Dr. Duk to extrapolate their lives. Whatever their mistake, it could not be repeated by the Thurkians, Gan thought aggressively. The Thurkians would steal their immortality and guard each and every one of their endless lives jealously.

He glanced at the last Earthman, but that individual paid no attention to him. He was so old he was beginning to lose the shaving function. Very few hairs appeared on his cheeks. His hair had the thickness of age, his eyes had the age-sparkle . . .

"If you could only speak," said Gan for probably the thousandth time. "If I could only reach you to tell you how much we appreciate your miraculous gift to us."

But there would most likely never be any communication. The Earthman was deaf and dumb and paralyzed. There were times when he followed them with his eyes. The balance of the time he lay in his machine, indifferent to their presence.

OUT of kindness to this last remnant of a great race, they would pregnate this survivor some day, fit him into the body of a woman—a Thurkian, of course—and thus guarantee his immortality. It would be a proud day for Thurkian science—the pupils aiding the last of the great masters by the masters' own methods!

Dr. Gan sighed happily and turned back to his routine. He checked the dials. The Earthman was well-fed, body temperature and pulse were normal. Gan fed the raw food into the machine that cooked and fed the patient, as he listened with half an ear to the bustle that was going on in the hospital corridors.

Now that the Princess was here, things were moving fast. It was sad for Gan to be assigned to this tiny room, cut off from the excitement that spread from Dr. Duk's offices throughout the building.

But perhaps Princess Aza would visit this room! Gan felt his heart quiver deliciously at the thought. Absently, he picked up two objects from the testing blanket and moved toward the Earthman.

This testing went on day after day. It would have been much simpler if they could have found a way to communicate with him. But the artifacts available were hard to understand and the attendants grew increasingly bored each day as various objects were tried without effect.



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DR. GAN stood over him, holding the two objects. One was a small package, filled with tubes —twenty of them. Each tube consisted of a white paper tightly wrapped around some dark-brown shredded leaf. He shoved one out of the package and held it before the patient's face. The Earthman looked up at him apathetically. Gan suspected that he considered them fools, but his frozen face muscles were unable to mirror his thoughts.

Gan smelled the white tube. Acrid! In the flame it gave off a displeasing blue smoke. Still, everything had to be tested on the Earthman—that was part of his job.

He shoved it in the lax mouth as far as it would go. It came right out again, wilted with saliva.

"Can you hear me?" Gan asked routinely. No, it was obvious he'd misjudged the tube's purpose.

He fitted another one in the Earthman's ear. "Can you hear me?"

The Earthman looked annoyed. Gan shoved another tube in his other ear. "Can you hear me?"

The man lay there, a short white tube protruding from each ear. The Doctor would have sworn that his face reddened.

Gan removed the tubes and threw them away. The next object was marked in weird hieroglyphics *S-o-n-o-v-o-x* and had a trademark imprint of a tiny ear. Gan frowned at the indecipherable writing. He wished the code had been broken to interpret Earth's language, but there was really less need, now that the great Dr. Duk had extrapolated everything so well.

There were a tiny plug and a flat box, separated by a long wire. He studied the device. He looked down at the patient, whose eyes were wide open and fixed, a sure sign that Gan held his attention.

"Oh, come," Gan said aloud. "I can't stuff this device in your ear or your mouth."

He examined the box—a tiny battery set and what looked like an amplifier circuit.

*Hmmmmm . . .*

He opened the Earthman's mouth and stuffed the battery in. That didn't set well with the patient and he quickly removed it. He put the plug in the man's mouth from where it was immediately spat out.

Oh, well—it couldn't have anything to do with hearing, because any fool knew you could hear better with your mouth open. At least Thurkians could, and Earthmen physically resembled Thurkians.

He tossed the object on the



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testing blanket and walked to the door, listening to sounds in the corridor. The Princess might well come to visit the last Earthman on his shift. Pray that she would!

HE turned back. The Earthman was going crazy. For him, that meant his eyes were blinking a mile a minute. Gan had never seen him blink so fast, try so hard to catch the attendant's eye.

He must want the tubes back. Gan got the little white tubes. His patient closed his eyes and imperceptibly dropped his head to one side—the way Gan himself did when he was disgusted with someone.

Gan held the device uncertainly over the Earthman.

The Earthman blinked like mad.

Gan shrugged and shoved the tiny plug in the man's ear. It fitted. So? Gan fiddled with the dial.

"Can you hear me? Can you hear me?"

Eyes open, mouth open, head imperceptibly nodding. It was the wildest, strongest reaction he'd ever seen the man make.

Gan felt an excited rush of pleasure. For a moment he forgot all about the events outside. This was the first real reaction anyone had ever gotten from the Earthman.

He leaned forward. "If you can hear me, close your right eye and blink it open again."

The man closed his left eye and blinked it open again.

The mute Earthman had gotten it backward. For the first time, Gan felt an uneasy doubt about the greatness of the Earthmen.

"If you can hear me, close your *left* eye and blink it open," he said.

The man blinked his right eye.

Something was radically wrong here. Still, the main problem was solved, wasn't it? If he chose to call left right and right left, it didn't matter so long as he was consistent.

But more was involved.

Gan sat in a chair. The old ache and throb were beginning to start again in his mind — the things he'd put behind him. The simplicity-to-complexity theory that had gotten him in trouble with Dr. Duk and the other scientists of Thurkia, destroyed his reputation and turned him into an insignificant male nurse.

"Every intelligent person knows," Dr. Duk had said, "that the first axiom of matter is breakdown. From complexity to simplicity. This is the way of the world. We are born with fully developed, complex organs. We evolve to a simpler form, a lesser body, less well developed organs.



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Eventually, we vanish spontaneously—that's total simplicity, or nothing."

Gan sighed. How true! Take numbers. You were born at 77 or 78 and aged until you were five or six. Complexity to simplicity. How could you deny it?

BUT once he had dared to deny it. Dr. Gan had postulated that there might be also a movement from simplicity to complexity. From, say, 1 to 100. From a person born as a simple-minded, tiny, underdeveloped body, aging to a complex old age with organs fully developed, and so on to death. This weird nonsense had gotten him thrown out of the Thurkian Academy of Science. It was just as well, he thought bitterly. For if, say, Earth happened to fall in the simplicity-to-complexity pattern that he postulated, instead of Duk's complexity to simplicity, then everything would have to be reversed.

Jesse H. Smith, for instance, instead of being born in 1953 and aging to 1883 in the normal greater-to-lesser ratio as ordained by nature, might have been born in 1883 and died in 1953, a lesser to a greater number.

On this basis, Earthmen would *not* be immortal, and . . .

Dr. Gan cringed. It was well that he had put all heresy behind him. It would completely upset not only Dr. Duk's great extrapolation of Earth, but would snatch immortality away from the Thurkians.

Still, it was odd that the patient didn't know his right side from his left. Gan would have to explore this. The next obvious question was to ask him in what direction the Sun rose on Earth. It rose in the west, of course, and traveled to the east, where it set. If he should maintain that it rose in the east and traveled to the west . . .

Gan shuddered. In spite of himself, his mind began to extrapolate.

He forced himself back to the task at hand. In just a few seconds, he had jumped the gap of communication with his patient. These wonderful Earthmen had obviously designed a hearing aid that not only carried sound, but was able to break down the thought intent into different languages. Probably by coordinating like areas with like areas inside the brains of the people using it.

Gan munched on an Earth carrot, putting it carefully into his ear and biting simultaneously on his rubber eating disc which was fitted into his mouth. His sharp, young teeth bit into the rubber eating disc and his jaw moved. The motion was translated to the inner ear, where his tiny, invisible real teeth rotated in sympa-



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thetic motion and chewed up the carrot.

He made a pre-swallow and the carrot moved down his Eustachian tube to his mouth and the back of his throat, where the swallow proper could take place.

He gulped in satisfaction, remembering that the Earthman used his mouth directly for food and didn't eat with his ears at all. An insignificant difference, but there were many differences to be taken into consideration, he was beginning to think.

Dr. Gan bent close to the man's ear, now convinced of its function. At that moment the great interruption came.

AN enormous crowd burst into the room. It was the great Dr. Duk along with the Princess of the People, the beautiful and glamorous Aza, smiling and charming as ever.

Princess Aza was a dreamy creature, with a milk-white complexion and long red hair. She always wore a look of mild surprise which had carried her through many terms of office. One got the impression that, whatever was said to her, it was the first time she'd ever heard it. He noticed with sadness that she had aged. Now her breasts jutted firmly against her dress where, formerly, they had sagged entrancingly. Her stomach had lost its alluring bulge and was shrunken flat. Her hips were rounder, her legs had slimmed and turned in at the ankles. Her skin, formerly full of the carefree wrinkles and blotches of youth, was unlined, smooth and clear as a dowager's. Her eyes were no longer red-rimmed but showed white irises.

Instead of reminding Gan of the careless irresponsibility of youth, she reminded him of sex, of alert physical hungers of old age.

She graciously blew in his ear and he quivered at the perfumed smell of her and the affectionate feel of her being. He blew back gently and saw a shudder go over her figure. This ear-blowing rite could be dangerous in old age!

She graciously bent then and blew into the ear of the Earthman in tribute to his great race. But with the ear-thing in, he obviously couldn't feel it, so she leaned over to blow into his free ear.

The man opened his mouth and bit the soft skin of her throat. Not exactly bit, but pursed his lips and brought them away from her skin with a smacking sound.

The Thurkians looked at each other in horror and dismay.

Then the voice of the great Duk filled the room.

"We must remember that, on



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Earth, the inhabitants did not mean hatred as we do by mouth-pressing," he rumbled.

"Their mouth-pressing serves a different function. From several visual images I have found, it is apparent that this gesture is merely a method of recognizing relatives. Earthmen were a great and glorious race, but they must have had poor sense of sight, because they could not recognize their own intimates. They performed much mouth-pressing to see if the individual they bit at one day was the same one as they bit another day. We are fairly sure that they determined by the lip-feel whether or not they were related.

"This business occurred mostly between members of the opposite sexes. Apparently, it was a miserable and defeating function, of which they were ashamed, if the grimaces on their features before and after are to be accounted for. It seemed that this was the unhappiness of their lives, but each race has its weak spot."

THERE was spontaneous applause at this minor bit of extrapolation.

Gan remembered his own great days as an extrapolator and clapped too. "Of course," he said aloud in his professional tone, as the applause died, "this extrapolation doesn't account for the fact that the Earthman couldn't possibly be related to the Princess and therefore would have no motive whatsoever for the mouth-pressing on her throat."

The Thurkians shifted uncomfortably in an embarrassing silence. The Princess looked uneasily surprised. Dr. Duk, a tiny man—for he was older than Gan—stepped forward, weaving on the balls of his feet, and thrust his face at Gan.

"This discredited attendant," said Dr. Duk, "is full of much nonsense. I must point out that it is he who advanced the outrageous simplicity-to-complexity theory. Whereas *I* am the one who has extrapolated the great immortality of the Earthmen and am about to give this invaluable gift to our race. Tomorrow night, I am going to pregnate the Princess of the People and start the great rejuvenation of our race. In the face of all this, can we waste time listening to this pseudo-scientist?"

The others clapped politely.

The Princess looked sympathetically at Gan. They had been classmates on Thurkia; she had been an ordinary student of politics then — they were lifelong friends.

"Still, it is odd that the Earthman mouth-pressed me," she said. "Perhaps Dr. Gan would care to extrapolate?"



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All eyes in the room became fixed on him and he blushed. "I hardly need to do that, kind Princess. I have just discovered a device with which to communicate with the Earthman. We can ask him why."

There was a gasp around the room.

Dr. Duk stared down at the hearing device attached to the patient.

He made a quick examination and then turned to the people with a triumphant smile.

"This fool Gan," he said, "is trying to make the Earthman hear us through the *ear*. How stupid can you get? We are exactly like Earthmen, cell for cell; obviously, then, they listen just as we do, through the mouth and not through the ear. How could he hear through his ears—the ears we know are for eating?"

"The Earthman eats with his mouth," said Gan quietly.

Dr. Duk looked annoyed. "Folly and more folly!" he cried. "Of course, we all know that the Earthman takes food into his mouth, but we also know that it travels to his ear to be chewed. His ears move, as do ours, when he eats."

Duk then stared triumphantly around the room.

"Now, Princess," he said when there were no further challenges, "we must hurry, for there is much to be done before the ceremony tomorrow. The broadcast to Thurkia—the ceremonial arrival of the oldest Thurkian we are going to plant in your immortality. Let us leave this discredited man to his senile dreams."

SADLY, Gan watched them go. He sat down forlornly by the testing blanket and held his head in his hands. Again he had made a spectacle of himself!

Was it possible that the Thurkians didn't *want* to know the truth about Earthmen? Was it possible that, satisfied with Duk's extrapolation, they were fearful of its being upset?

He turned grimly to the patient. "Let us set up a code," he said through the ear-aid. "Blink one eye for yes, two blinks for no. Agreed?"

The Earthman blinked once.

"Blink both eyes at the same time for maybe — or I don't know!" he said. "Then we will set up the alphabet. Now, let's begin . . ."

The Earthman told him that he had kissed the Princess because it was a sign of affection.

Gan outlined the plans of the Thurkians, carefully explaining Dr. Duk's extrapolation. "Now," he asked, "is Duk correct?"

Two blinks—no.

Duk was wrong. Earthmen were not immortal. They lived



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from simplicity to complexity. Their so-called birthgrounds were actually graveyards.

Gan turned off the ear-aid, went to the window and looked down on the moon-bathed gardens of the hospital. The Thurkians had come so far in space, had hoped for so much! Now, only he knew that the great dream had become dust and ashes.

In the course of a career, a scientist extrapolated and then went into the lab and tried out his ideas. The few that were correct won fame, advanced the race. History was silent about those who were wrong. Truly, the truths of the Universe were almost unbearable.

Furthermore, the bearer of truth was often one who suffered. Gan remembered how Pod had received the double-T for exploding early notions of the humors and rightfully describing the circulation of the blood. Even earlier, there was Dr. Nok, who had received the double-T for overturning the favored idea that their planet Thurkos was the center of the Universe.

The double-T was a knife incision, deep down and crossways. One between the ribs near the heart, one in the abdomen. It was guaranteed to cause instant death and the Thurkian vanished in the spontaneity of his life's end.

It was just barely possible that he, Gan, might receive the double-T for snatching the Duk extrapolation away from the people. On Thurkia there was much excitement; parades—speeches—wild riots of happiness, with the spontaneity of death finally overcome. Duk was a great national hero.

Yet the Princess Aza faced a horrible death under Duk's knife if Gan's interpretations of the Earthman's answers were right. He signed. How could he let the Princess of the People die?

GAN checked out, turning his patient over to Mol. Instead of returning to his lonely tent at the edge of the hospital grounds, he sought out the great Dr. Duk, who lived in splendor on the tower floor of the remaining hospital wing.

Gan was surprised that Duk admitted him so quickly, but he came directly to the point. "It would be possible for me to keep my mouth closed, retain what position and salary I have and let your erroneous extrapolation fall of its own weight," he said. "However, there is our Princess to think of. The patient has given me the understanding that Earthmen are not immortal."

Duk smiled. "It is always a pleasure for one scientist to tell another he's a fool, eh, Gan? This



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is the real motive in coming here to see me, is it not?"

"The truth is always my study," sighed Gan.

Dr. Duk laughed and pulled a strange-looking machine over to the center of the room. "I now have evidence that my extrapolation *is* correct," he said. "It's so inconvertible that even a dim-witted idiot such as yourself cannot deny it. It is the visual image, on a machine, made by the Earthmen themselves."

"The Princess is here," said an assistant.

"I have asked the Princess to see this proof," said Duk, "to set her completely at ease for tomorrow's experiment. You may as well stay."

The Princess came in and took a comfortable place, while Duk covered the preparations for the showing with a few remarks.

"I have now completed a comprehensive extrapolation of Earth's history. Like our own planet, Earth began as a marvelously complex association of humans known as a world-city. Then the world-city separated into world-countries during a war cycle, and continually divided into smaller and smaller units, as the Earthmen gave up complex machines and simplified their lives. They went through an industrial cycle and, disgusted with smoky and dirty cities, gave them up to live on farms and in tiny towns. They had internal combustion engines in their time, as we've had. From these, they progressed to horses, slowing the pace of their lives in order to relax from neurotic pressures.

"After that, they gave up great segments of land—whole continents—to nature and withdrew to one segment known as Europe.

"Ever flowering, they continued onward, giving up, over the centuries, mercantilism for religious monarchy, religious monarchy for feudal kingship. Large wars became small wars. Complex weapons were succeeded by simple swords and battle-axes. Ever they developed to the seats of their civilizations which they called Rome and finally the apex, Greece.

"From this pinnacle, Man stared into great heights, as yet undreamed of. A whole globe covered with virginal growth. Massive animals, destined to grow tall enough to eat from treetops. Glaciers large enough to cover a third of their globe, to cool off the hot land . . .

"But this was the future they never reached. It is portrayed as constructed drawings in dream-books of their future. Their own extrapolations. Somewhere, either slightly after a man called Einstein or slightly before a man called Homer, some radioactive



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disease came along which interrupted their normalcy. We do not yet know exactly where, in terms of their years, we are at this moment. But you can bank on its being in the period between those two men, and it makes not the slightest difference. Eventually I shall puzzle it all out."

AMID a polite scatter of applause, the man who worked on the strange machine now raised his hand as if ready.

"A sideline to their history was their pregnating," continued Dr. Duk. "Now, here is the actual proof of Man's immortality." He signaled an assistant, the lights dimmed and the aliens watched a picture unreel on the white hospital walls.

It show a masked man in white spanking a tiny, aged Earthman in an operating room. Then the man placed the little creature into the woman. Two men placed the woman on a portable bed and transported her to another room marked *Labor,* where she fussed and tossed. Then it showed her departure from the hospital with her smiling husband. It pictured her at home going about her daily tasks clumsily, with occasional visits to the doctor's office to see that the immortality went well. Eventually, the woman achieved her normal, slim figure and the film ended with the cessation of the human commentator's voice, which held no meaning for the Thurkians.

Dr. Duk sat back in pleasure as the lights came up again. The assistant extrapolators all clapped, and the delighted Princess blew in his ear. They all filed out of the room.

Duk was the last to go, and he turned to Gan who had remained seated. "As for your unmitigated, foul attempt to discredit me," he said, pausing at the door, "it is beneath my notice. I shall not press charges. You may return to your half-mad Earthman who, twisted by the years spent in his breathing machine, has become forgetful about his race's great destiny. You can trade your mad extrapolations with each other. The blind leading the blind! Good night, Dr. Gan."

Gan sighed. Duk might be right about the patient's madness. He hadn't thought of that.

Gan examined the projecting machine. The button had an arrow that pointed to the hieroglyphics *r-e-v-e-r-s-e.* He snapped the button and turned on the machine again. The film ran backward, this time starting with the girl having a slim figure and ending in the delivery room.

It made sense that way too, he thought.

He was aware that someone



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else was in the room. A soft hand touched his arm.

"It's no use, dear friend," said Princess Aza. "I came back to tell you I was sorry that you had gotten the worst part of the argument. Now, I too have seen the correct images."

"If Duk is wrong and this sequence is right, you know you die."

"I have thought of that. I have asked Dr. Duk to convince himself by speaking with the Earthman. But Duk is so seldom wrong that I am sure the Earthman is mad. No, tomorrow's ceremony must take place, for I dare let no other woman claim the honor ahead of me. But I thank you for worrying over me, dear friend."

THEY awoke Gan sometime in the middle of the night. It was Tok who was leaning over the cot in Gan's lonely tent, across the grounds from the hospital, in the space reserved for underlings.

Tok's face was anxious. "There's been a crisis at the hospital. The Princess of the People wants to see you at once."

Gan hurried across the grass past the white markers of the Earthmen's birthplace for the second time within twenty-four hours. He found the Princess agitated.

"Our great Dr. Duk," she gasped. "He is dying. The Earthman —*he* was responsible. Please go there at once and see what it's all about. Everyone around me seems to have a different story, but I know I can trust you, old friend."

Gan hurried to the Earthman's room. A Thurkian blade protruded from the patient's chest in an incomplete double-T. The man's face was shiny with sweat. Gan realized at once that Earth's last survivor was going to die. He smiled weakly at Gan and made a friendly gesture with his finger.

Duk, he revealed—using the eye code with much prompting from Gan—had come to him and used the same code. Duk was under the impression that Gan was using the Earthman, and was worried that the last Earthman would accept the Gan extrapolation against the massive evidence of his own great work. And, since it worried the Princess of the People, Dr. Duk tried to force the patient to recant.

The Earthman had refused to support Dr. Duk and had insisted that Gan was right. Whereupon, Duk had switched off the breathing apparatus of the patient's machine. Without his iron lung, he could not live more than a few moments. In fear of his life, writhing in suffocation, the Earthman had had to wink assent and Dr. Duk had turned on the ma-



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chine again. But the patient had realized that Duk's intention — in his mistaken notion — to immortalize a great many Thurkians could only end in death and horror.

Therefore, he had asked Duk to bring a certain box of pills to him from the testing blanket. These pills, the Earthman had told Duk, were language pills. By taking them, Duk would instantly understand Earth's language and would be able to impress the people of Thurkia with his knowledge.

Duk gulped the pills greedily. They came in a box marked with the hieroglyphics *s-t-r-y-c-h-n-i-n-e*. Almost immediately Duk realized he'd been tricked. He barely had time to plunge the knife into the human's chest before he had been overcome.

GRIMLY, Gan hurried to the Princess and told her of Duk's perfidy. He asked her to return with him to the patient's room and they were at the door when Mol brought them word on Dr. Duk.

"He died," said Mol, "bravely. He disappeared in a genteel way, turning into a bright, pink cloud and atomizing with all of the dignity of his greatness. He will be long remembered."

"He will be remembered," said Gan.

Inside the room, they found a small group staring at the patient with awe.

"He has died," whispered Tok. "But see—watch what the machine does!"

The dead Earthman lay on the bed. Relays clicked, lights flashed. Presently, the complicated breathing apparatus was lifted away from the body.

"Now we shall see a strange thing," cried Tok. "Perhaps even the Earthman's immortality by machinery in some kind of special form."

"I doubt it," said Gan dryly.

One side of the bed rose. A container beneath the bed opened. Two metal arms of great size extended a box. The Thurkians gasped in wonder as the body slid from the bed and was gently lowered into the box, which had a plush interior, and was six feet long, three feet wide. The lid closed and with a great deal of decorum, the box disappeared through a trap door in the floor.

Gan turned to his fellow Thurkians. "This proves beyond a doubt my own extrapolation," he said. "That box called a coffin is now to be placed in what Dr. Duk erroneously called the birthgrounds, but which are really the graveyards of the Earthmen, signifying the end, not the beginning of their lives. They lived from simplicity to complexity,



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after all, and, like us, didn't have immortality."

"IT was a great thing to have held resolutely and firmly to your theory when all those around you jeered," said the Princess of the People. "It was a great thing to have stood against a man of Dr. Duk's reputation and won out in the end."

Gan waved a deprecatory hand. "More important, you, my dear Princess, are still living."

The Princess, as usual, looked surprised. But it was evident she had something else on her mind. "Speaking of resolutions," she said, "it is now my time to do service to Thurkia by marrying and having children."

Gan felt his heart beat faster.

"I have therefore appointed you Acting Chief Extrapolator of Thurkia, a position of prominence. And—if you care to—if you wish to—mate with a suitable Princess, I mean . . ."

The Princess blushed in confusion. They were standing on a hospital balcony under the soft, quiet moonlight of Earth.

Gan extrapolated rapidly and caught her meaning. "Princess," he said, gulping. "Will you marry me?"

"Why, Gan!" she said, laughing in embarrassment. "Why, Gan, I didn't think you cared. Why—it is just possible that I will, though you catch me entirely by surprise."

He cut off her stammering with loving blows in her ear.

Then they faced each other and the Thurkian Princess of the People, after making a ceremonious sign, turned her back and bent over. Gan kicked her.

And when she in turn had kicked him, it was formally sealed. There was no turning back now, for once the love-kick is placed, the couple are married. This Thurkian ritual establishes the tender, serious finale to courtship and the gateway to married life.

And the Moon shone on the white markers.

—R. E. BANKS

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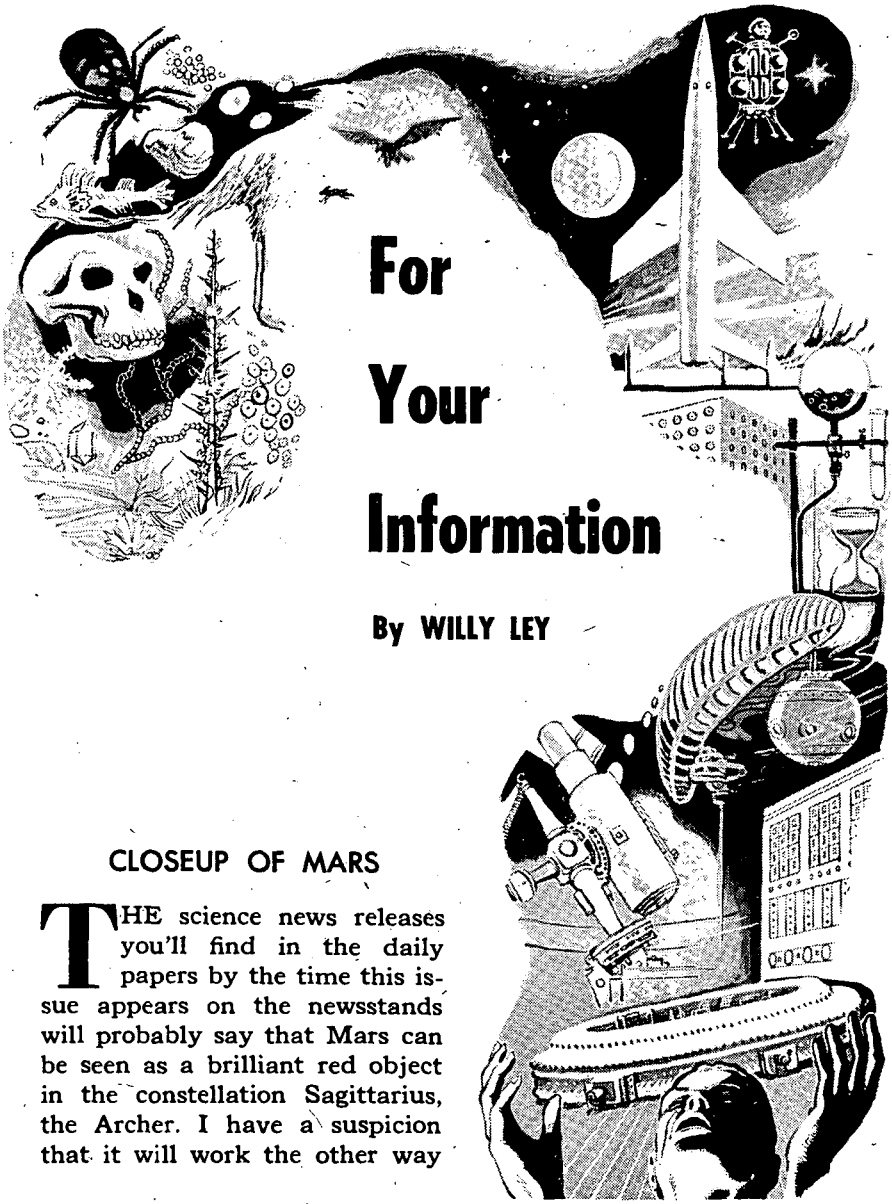

# For Your Information

By WILLY LEY

## CLOSEUP OF MARS

THE science news releases you'll find in the daily papers by the time this issue appears on the newsstands will probably say that Mars can be seen as a brilliant red object in the constellation Sagittarius, the Archer. I have a suspicion that it will work the other way



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round for most people—they'll see a conspicuous bright reddish star in the southern sky and, having read the news releases, will conclude that the other stars around it must be the constellation of Sagittarius.

This is one of the years when Mars is in "opposition," which simply means that it finds itself along a line drawn from the Sun through the Earth.

Astronomers are ready for the event. Every observatory has alloted telescope time to Mars during those four weeks from the middle of June to the middle of July. The National Geographic Society, in combination with the Lowell Observatory of Flagstaff, Arizona, has sent a team of astronomers to Bloemfontein in South Africa to obtain a coordinated photographic study from a point in the southern hemisphere. The planet will be photographed from high-flying aircraft and there has even been some hopeful talk about expending a high-altitude research missile or two.

ACTUALLY, an opposition of Mars is not precisely a rare event. Since the Earth needs 365¼ days to go around the Sun once and Mars needs 687 days to do the same, the two planets must pass each other, with the faster Earth overtaking the slower Mars at regular intervals.

What this interval must be is comparatively easy to calculate. The Earth, as seen from the Sun, moves through just about one degree of arc per day, since a full circle has 360 degrees. The exact figure for the movement of the Earth is 59 minutes and 48.2 seconds of arc. The planet Mars, also as seen from the Sun, moves about half a degree of arc per day, the exact figure being 31 minutes and 26.5 seconds of arc.

If we express this average movement in seconds of arc, the Earth covers 3548.2 per day and Mars 1886.5 per (Earth) day. The Earth, therefore, gains 1661.7 seconds of arc per day.

With this figure available, the question "when will the Earth catch up with Mars again" becomes a simple division. There are 360 times 60 times 60 seconds of arc in a full circle; dividing this by the daily gain of 1661.7, we obtain 779.92 days or 2 years and 49.42 days. Therefore, there is an opposition of Mars every 2 years and 50 days.

Well, then, if that is the case, why is there so much shouting about this opposition of 1954 and the one to come in 1956? The answer, so to speak, is that all girls are not equally pretty and one loaf of bread is not necessarily as good as another. The oppositions differ in quality because the orbit of Mars is a



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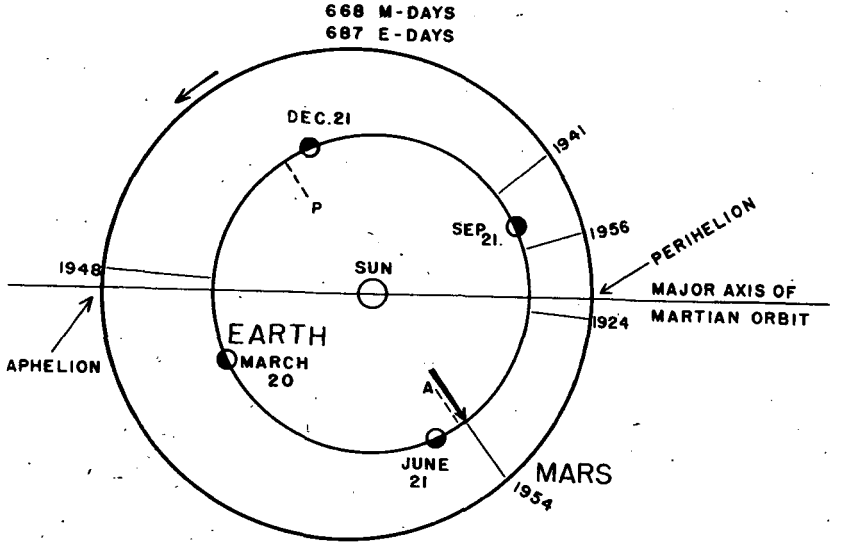


Diagram of the orbits of Earth and Mars, showing the recurring positions of the Earth at the change of the seasons. Perihelion and aphelion of Earth are indicated by the letters P and A at broken lines. The arrow points to the position of this year's opposition. A number of other oppositions are indicated by the dated lines connecting the orbits of the two planets. Some of the minimum distances during past oppositions were: 1924 (Aug. 24) 34,637,000 miles; 1941 (Oct. 10) 38,500,000; 1948 (Feb. 18) 63,000,000 miles.

rather pronounced ellipse.

At the point of its orbit closest to the Sun—the perihelion—the distance Sun-Mars is 128 million miles. At the point of its orbit farthest from the Sun—the aphelion—the distance Sun-Mars measures 155 million miles. Since the orbit of the Earth is far more circular, there is obviously a difference between an opposition occurring when Mars is at, or near, its perihelion and an opposition that occurs when Mars is near its aphelion. The opposition of 1924 was almost precisely a "perihelion opposition" while the one of 1948 was very nearly an "aphelion opposition."

Now the orbit of the Earth is not circular, either. When Earth is at its perihelion, the distance to the Sun is 91,341,000 miles. When Earth is at aphelion, the distance is 94,450,000 miles, a difference of slightly over three



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million miles. For the sake of getting a good look at Mars, one could only wish that Earth's aphelion were in the same direction from the Sun as the perihelion of Mars. To some extent, this is really the case. At least the Earth is still on that portion of its orbit which is farther from the Sun than average when it passes the perihelion of Mars.

This year's opposition, incidentally, will take place almost when Earth is at aphelion, although Mars is still a long way from its perihelion. The distance between the two planets is going to be about 40,300,000 miles. At the next opposition, on September 11, 1956, the distance will be about the shortest it can be, namely 35,400,000 miles.

THOUGH a perihelion opposition is obviously "better" than an aphelion opposition, astronomers do not neglect the latter by any means. In addition to what might be called general principles, there are two good specific reasons. One is that, to observatories in the northern hemisphere of the Earth, Mars is higher up in the sky when Earth is near its perihelion. This also explains the value of the team working at Bloemfontein this year. The other is connected with the position of the Martian axis of rotation.

Like that of the Earth, the axis of Mars does not stand vertically on the plane of its orbit. In the case of our own planet, there is the well-known inclination of 23° 27′. The figure for Mars reads very much alike—24° 52′.

But while the Earth's axis, at aphelion, is inclined *toward* the Sun, so that our North Polar regions have summer at that time, the axis of Mars, near Martian perihelion, is inclined *away* from the Sun. The two axes may be said to form a V and at a perihelion opposition, the Martian *South* Pole is in the light of the Sun, has summer, and is visible to us. The Martian North Pole is in darkness and we can't see it at all.

Obviously, then, our only chance to observe the Martian North Polar regions is when Mars is at the other side of its orbit—that is, during an aphelion opposition. Naturally the position of Mars' axis varies as little as ours; it always points to the same spot in space in the course of a Martian year. It so happens that there is no conspicuous star near either of the celestial poles of Mars. The "Martians," therefore, have neither a northern nor a southern Pole Star.

Just as the inclination of the Martian axis happens to be quite similar but slightly larger than ours, so the Martian day happens



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to be slightly longer than ours. It is 24 hours, 37 minutes and about 22½ seconds. (The most precise recent figure published gives 24h 37′ and 22.6679″.) This difference between the terrestrial and the Martian day, incidentally, is within the adjustment period of a good watch, so that

HAMILTON SPACE CLOCK: Numbers around face indicate Mars time. Small dial in center tells Earth time. Both calendars are twelve months—Mars dial is at the left; the other is Earth's.

explorers could use ordinary watches during their stay on Mars.

Because the Martian day is slightly longer than the Earth day, the Martian year, 687 Earth days long, has only 668.6 days as experienced by somebody on Mars.

AS has just been mentioned, a good watch could be adjusted to the slightly longer Martian day. But an exploring party would not only like to know the Martian time, they would also like to know what time it is in Los Angeles, New York, London or Berlin or wherever they happen to come from. Beyond that, since the slightly longer Martian day tends to creep more and more into an Earth "tomorrow," they would have to have means of keeping track of the terrestrial calendar as well as of their own. Such a device is no longer a gadget of the future.

Rushing events a bit, Dr. I. M. Levitt, director of the Fels Planetarium, has designed a clock which shows both Earth and Martian time on two 24-hour dials and keeps track of the calendars as well. The two 24-hour days present no difficulties and the Earth calendar, obsolescent and rickety as it is, is at least familiar. But there were some difficulties with the Martian calendar. Dividing the Martian year into 12 months, you get eight months of 55 (Martian, of course) days each and four months of 56 days each. But at the end of the year you have



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6/10th of a day left over, which is worse than the dangling quarter-day at the end of an Earth year.

To accommodate those 6/10th of a Martian day, the Martian calendar has to run in 5-year periods, the first and last of these five years being "short years" with 668 days, the other three "normal years" with 669 days and a 57th of December. This arrangement differs from astronomical reality by 0.0019 days per year and, to take care of the difference, every 500th year will have to lose a day. Even then, there is still a tiny difference, but it would take a full 10,000 years to accumulate to a full day.

Well, to get down to Earth: The conspicuous reddish star you see in the southern sky is Mars, the "red and green planet," as Dr. Hubertus Strughold called it. About a year from now, there might be something new about it to tell.

## THE INNER PLANETS

I HAVE a letter from Bill Courval of 741 Isthmus Ct. in San Diego, California, asking a question about which others may have wondered, too, on occasion. The letter reads: "Since we face away from the Sun at night, why is it that the two inner planets are visible to us?" The answer is, of course, that the two inner planets Mercury and Venus are *not* visible at night, but only in the morning and evening hours before sunrise and after sunset, respectively.

The diagram shows that, seen from the Earth, the farthest Mercury can be from the Sun is about 27 degrees of arc, while Venus can be as much as 48 degrees of arc from the Sun.

If we imagine that both planets happen to be simultaneously in this especially favorable position ("extreme elongation" is the technical term), Venus would rise 48° ahead of the Sun and Mercury 27° ahead of the Sun in the morning.

The rotation of the Earth amounts to 15 degrees of arc per hour, which makes the apparent movement of the Sun across the sky 15° per hour. Therefore, the Sun would appear at the horizon just about three hours after Venus did.

But the sky begins to light up when the Sun is still some 18° below the horizon, so that the period during which the planets could be clearly visible against a *dark* sky is shortened by about one hour. Venus happens to be luminous enough to show up brightly even against a fairly light sky. Mercury is less luminous to begin with. It is also much smaller and farther away, so that



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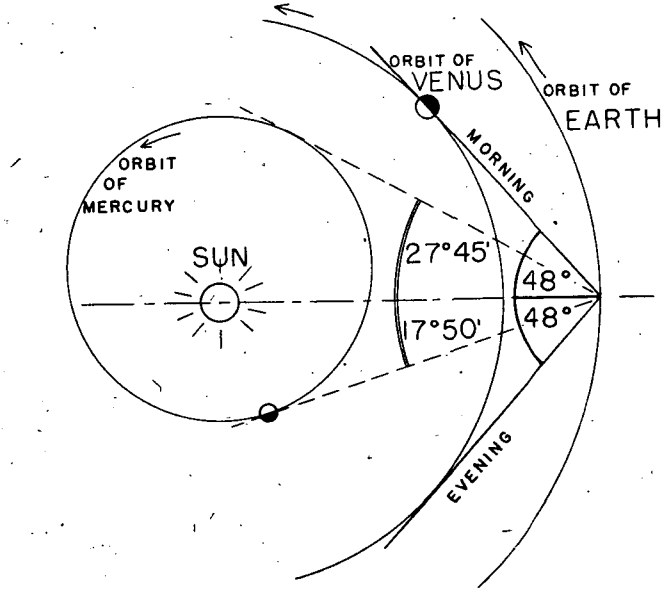
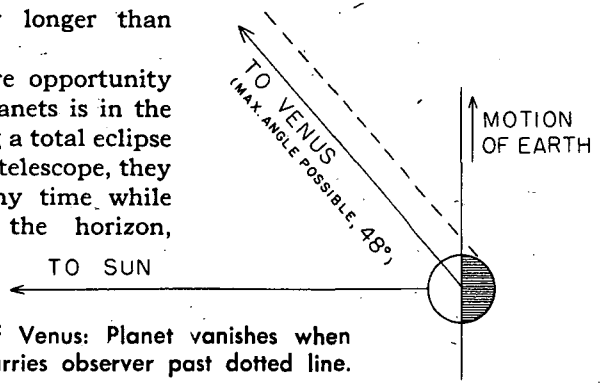



Diagram of possible positions of the two inner planets shows why, seen from Earth, they seem to be farthest from the Sun.

it soon fades in a brightening morning sky. For this reason, the period during which Mercury can be seen with the naked eye, even under very favorable circumstances, is hardly longer than half an hour.

Another and rare opportunity to see the inner planets is in the daylight sky during a total eclipse of the Sun. With a telescope, they can be seen at any time while they are above the horizon,




Limit of visibility of Venus: Planet vanishes when rotation of earth carries observer past dotted line.



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whether the sky is bright or not. Probably the first astronomer to observe the two inner planets systematically during daylight hours was Giovanni Virginio Schiaparelli at Milan, Italy.

## ANY QUESTIONS?

*You once said on the radio that the star nearest to our sun, namely* alpha *Centauri, cannot be seen from any place in the United States. Well, which is the nearest star that can be seen from the United States, especially from the vicinity of New York?*

*Irene Kolitsch*
*23 Railroad Avenue*
*Montville, N. J.*

**Alpha Canis Majoris, better known as Sirius, 8.6 light-years away.**

*Could you shed some light on the mystery of Simultaneous Universes or Alternate Worlds, please?*

*Colin Parsons*
*31 Benwood Court*
*Sutton, Surrey, England*

**The idea was once treated very seriously in a German work on higher mathematics as a mathematical concept, but since the only application of this concept so far is in science fiction, it might be better to stick to literature.**

**What may have been the first literary example was a story written by a gentleman by the name of Winston Churchill, several decades before he became Sir Winston. The title of the story was *If Lee Had Lost at Gettysburg*. Of course he did lose, but the story pretended to have been written in a world where Lee won the battle of Gettysburg and the author had a scholar there try to figure out how the world would look if Lee had lost.**

**In other words, the concept makes the assumption that there is one world where the Confederates won and one where the Confederates were defeated. Likewise, there is one world where the American Colonies seceded from the British Empire and another world where they did not. Also a world in which Martin Luther did what he did and another one in which he was elected Pope. One in which Lenin overthrew the Kerenski government and one in which the train in which he traveled through Germany was derailed and Lenin perished in the accident. One in which the Allies came first with the atom bomb and one in which Heisenberg did.**

**In short, every important turning point in history produces—in theory—not a "new" world, but two.**



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*Since light is known to exert pressure on small objects, it also should cause "thrust" at its source. This probably would not work in the atmosphere, but could we build a "light-beam rocket" once space has been reached? You could not ask for a higher exhaust velocity than that of light, could you?*

*Lt. Edward O. Olney*
*RCAF*
*Toronto, Ont., Canada*

**I agree on two counts: (A) that a light beam would be a propulsive force and (B) that everybody would be satisfied with an exhaust velocity of 186,000 miles per second. Unfortunately, exhaust velocity alone doesn't do it. There has to be some mass and there is also the question of efficiency involved, at which point the ratio between exhaust velocity and rocket velocity enters the picture. It so happens that two specific examples of a "light-beam drive" were worked out by T. F. Reinhardt of the U. S. Naval Air Rocket Test Station at Lake Denmark, New Jersey, for a lecture at the Annual Meeting of the American Rocket Society in Atlantic City in 1951.**

**To obtain a thrust of *one pound* from a light beam, one would need 1,330,000 kilowatts —which is just about the electrical power output of Niagara Falls! A medium-sized research rocket would have to have a thrust of 10,000 lbs. So the current to be fed to the light source would have to be a current of a nice round million amperes at an astronomical 13.3 million volts.**

**(Reinhardt added, incidentally, that a conductor for a one-million-ampere current would have to have a diameter of about 20 inches if made of copper and would weigh 1200 pounds per foot.)**

**If the light source had an area of one square foot, its temperature would have to be 1,620,000 degrees Fahrenheit. Naturally, you will want to limit the temperature of the light source to a practical figure, perhaps 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit. In that case, the area of the light source would have to have an area of 60 acres! All this for 10,000 lbs. of thrust, which one might obtain by burning 65 lbs. of fuel per second.**

**I suggest we go on using light for illumination only.**

**—WILLY LEY**



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# GREEN THUMB

By CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

*A county agent has a tough enough job—he shouldn't also have to act as unsuspecting and unrecognized ambassador for all Earth!*

I HAD come back from lunch and was watching the office while Millie went out to get a bite to eat. With my feet up on the desk in a comfortable position, I was giving considerable attention to how I might outwit a garbage-stealing dog.

The dog and I had carried on a feud for months and I was about ready to resort to some desperate measures.

I had blocked up the can with heavy concrete blocks so he couldn't tip it over, but he was a big dog and could stand up and reach down into the can and drag all the garbage out. I had tried putting a heavy weight on the lid, but he simply dragged it off and calmly proceeded with his foraging. I had waited up and caught him red-handed at it and heaved some rocks and whatever else was handy at him, but he recognized tactics such as

Illustrated by FLEMINGER



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these for what they were and they didn't bother him. He'd come back in half an hour, calm as ever.

I had considered setting a light muskrat trap on top of the garbage so that, when he reached down into the can, he'd get his muzzle caught. But if I did that, sure as hell I'd forget to take it out some Tuesday morning and the garbageman would get caught instead. I had toyed with the idea of wiring the can so the dog would get an electric shock when he came fooling around. But I didn't know how to go about wiring it and, if I did, ten to one I'd fix it up so I'd electrocute him instead of just scaring him off, and I didn't want to kill him.

I like dogs, you understand. That doesn't mean I have to like *all* dogs, does it? And if you had to scrape up garbage every morning, you'd be just as sore at the mutt as I was.

WHILE I was wondering if I couldn't put something in a particularly tempting bit of garbage that would make him sick and still not kill him, the phone rang.

It was old Pete Skinner out on Acorn Ridge.

"Could you come out?" he asked.

"Maybe," I said. "What you got?"

"I got a hole out in the north forty."

"Sink-hole?"

"Nope. Looks like someone dug it out and carried off the dirt."

"Who would do that, Pete?"

"I don't know. And that ain't all of it. They left a pile of sand beside the hole."

"Maybe that's what they dug out of the hole."

"You know well enough," said Pete, "that I haven't any sandy soil. You've run tests enough on it. All of mine is clay."

"I'll be right out," I told him.

A county agent gets some funny calls, but this one topped them all. Hog cholera, corn borers, fruit blight, milk production records—any of these would have been down my alley. But a hole in the north forty?

And yet, I suppose I should have taken it as a compliment that Pete called me. When you've been a county agent for fifteen years, a lot of farmers get to trust you and some of them, like Pete, figure you can straighten out any problem. I enjoy a compliment as much as anybody. It's the headaches that go with them that I don't like.

When Millie came back, I drove out to Pete's place, which



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is only four or five miles out of town.

Pete's wife told me that he was up in the north forty, so I went there and found not only Pete, but some of his neighbors. All of them were looking at the hole and doing a lot of talking. I never saw a more puzzled bunch of people.

The hole was about 30 feet in diameter and about 35 feet deep, an almost perfect cone—not the kind of hole you'd dig with a pick and shovel. The sides were cut as clean as if they'd been machined, but the soil was not compressed, as it would have been if machinery had been used.

The pile of sand lay just a short distance from the hole. Looking at it, I had the insane feeling that, if you shoveled that sand into the hole, it would exactly fit. It was the whitest sand I've ever seen and, when I walked over to the pile and picked up some of it, I saw that it was clean. Not just ordinary clean, but *absolutely* clean—as though laundered grain by grain.

I stood around for a while, like the rest of them, staring at the hole and the pile of sand and wishing I could come up with some bright idea. But I wasn't able to. There was the hole and there was the sand. The topsoil was dry and powdery and would have shown wheelmarks or any other kind if there'd been any. There weren't.

I TOLD Pete maybe he'd better fence in the whole business, because the sheriff or somebody from the state, or even the university, might want to look it over. Pete said that was a good idea and he'd do it right away.

I went back to the farmhouse and asked Mrs. Skinner to give me a couple of fruit jars. One of them I filled with a sample from the sand pile and the other with soil from the hole, being careful not to jolt the walls.

By this time, Pete and a couple of the neighbors had gotten a wagonload of fence posts and some wire and were coming out to the field. I waited and helped unload the posts and wire, then drove back to the office, envying Pete. He was satisfied to put up the fence and let me worry about the problem.

I found three fellows waiting for me. I gave Millie the fruit jars and asked her to send them right away to the Soils Bureau at the State Farm Campus. Then I settled down to work.

Other people drifted in and it was late in the afternoon before I could call up the Soils Bureau and tell them I wanted the contents of the two jars analyz-



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ed. I told them a little of what had happened, although not all of it for, when you tried to put it into words, it sounded pretty weird.

"Banker Stevens called and asked if you'd drop by his place on your way home," Millie told me.

"What would Stevens want with me?" I asked. "He isn't a farmer and I don't owe him any money."

"He grows fancy flowers," said Millie.

"I know that. He lives just up the street from me."

"From what I gathered, something awful happened to them. He was all broken up."

So, on the way home, I stopped at the Stevens place. The banker was out in the yard, waiting for me. He looked terrible. He led me around to the big flower garden in the back and never have I seen such utter devastation. In that whole area, there wasn't a single plant alive. Every one of them had given up the ghost and was lying wilted on the ground.

"What could have done it, Joe?" asked Stevens and, the way he said it, I felt sorry for him.

After all, those flowers were a big thing in his life. He'd raised them from special seed and he'd babied them along, and for anybody who is crazy about flowers, I imagine they were tops.

"Someone might have used some spray on them," I said. "Almost any kind of spray, if you didn't dilute it enough, would kill them."

OUT in the garden, I took a close look at the dead flowers, but nowhere could I see any sign of the burning from too strong a spray.

Then I saw the holes, at first only two or three of them, then, as I went on looking, dozens of them. They were all over the garden, about an inch in diameter, for all the world as if someone had taken a broomstick and punched holes all over the place. I got down on my knees and could see that they tapered, the way they do when you pull weeds with big taproots out of the ground.

"You been pulling weeds?" I asked.

"Not big ones like that," said the banker. "I take good care of those flowers, Joe. You know that. Keep them weeded and watered and cultivated and sprayed. Put just the right amount of commercial fertilizer in the soil. Try to keep it at top fertility."

"You should use manure. It's



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better than all the commercial fertilizer you can buy."

"I don't agree with you. Tests have proved . . . "

It was an old argument, one that we fought out each year. I let him run on, only half listening to him, while I picked up some of the soil and crumbled it. It was dead soil. You could feel that it was. It crumbled at the lightest touch and was dry, even when I dug a foot beneath the surface.

"You water this bed recently?" I asked.

"Last evening," Stevens said.

"When did you find the flowers like this?"

"This morning. They looked fine last night. And now—" he blinked fast.

I asked him for a fruit jar and filled it with a sample of the soil.

"I'll send this in and see if there's anything wrong with it," I said.

A bunch of dogs were barking at something in the hedge in front of my place when I got home. Some of the dogs in the neighborhood are hell on cats. I parked the car and picked up an old hoe handle and went out to rescue the cat they seemed to have cornered.

They scattered when they saw me coming and I started to look in the hedge for the cat. There wasn't any and that aroused my curiosity and I wondered what the dogs could have been barking at. So I went hunting.

And I found it.

IT was lying on the ground, close against the lower growth of the hedge, as if it had crawled there for protection.

I reached in and pulled it out —a weed of some sort, about five feet tall, and with a funny root system. There were eight roots, each about an inch in diameter at the top and tapering to a quarter inch or so. They weren't all twisted up, but were sort of sprung out, so that there were four to the side, each set of four in line. I looked at their tips and I saw that the roots were not broken off, but ended in blunt, strong points.

The stalk, at the bottom, was about as thick as a man's fist. There were four main branches covered with thick, substantial, rather meaty leaves; but the last foot of the branches was bare of leaves. At the top were several flower or seed pouches, the biggest of them about the size of an old-fashioned coffee mug.

I squatted there looking at it. The more I looked, the more puzzled I became. As a county agent, you have to know quite



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a bit about botany and this plant was like none I had seen before.

I dragged it across the lawn to the toolshed back of the garage and tossed it in there, figuring that after supper I'd have a closer look at it.

I went in the house to get my evening meal ready and decided to broil a steak and fix up a bowl of salad.

A lot of people in town wonder at my living in the old homestead, but I'm used to the house and there seemed to be no sense in moving somewhere else when all it costs me is taxes and a little upkeep. For several years before Mother died, she had been quite feeble and I did all the cleaning and helped with the cooking, so I'm fairly handy at it.

After I washed the dishes, I read what little there was to read in the evening paper and then looked up an old text on botany, to see if I could find anything that might help identify the plant.

I didn't find anything and, just before I went to bed, I got a flashlight and went out, imagining, I suppose, that I'd find the weed somehow different than I remembered it.

I opened the door of the shed and flashed the light where I'd tossed the weed on the floor. At first, I couldn't see it, then I heard a leafy rustling over in one corner and I turned the light in that direction.

The weed had crawled over to one corner and it was trying to get up, its stem bowed out—the way a man would arch his back—pressing against the wall of the shed.

STANDING there with my mouth open, watching it try to raise itself erect, I felt horror and fear. I reached out to the corner nearest the door and snatched up an axe.

If the plant had succeeded in getting up, I might have chopped it to bits. But, as I stood there, I saw the thing would never make it. I was not surprised when it slumped back on the floor.

What I did next was just as unreasoning and instinctive as reaching for the axe.

I found an old washtub and half filled it with water. Then I picked up the plant—it had a squirmish feel to it, like a worm—stuck its roots into the water, and pushed the tub back against the wall, so the thing could be braced upright.

I went into the house and ransacked a couple of closets until I found the sunlamp I'd bought a couple of years back, to use when I had a touch of arthritis



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in my shoulder. I rigged up the lamp and trained it on the plant, not too close. Then I got a big shovelful of dirt and dumped it in the tub.

And that, I figured, was about all I could do. I was giving the plant water, soil-food and simulated sunlight. I was afraid that, if I tried a more fancy treatment, I might kill it, for I hadn't any notion of what conditions it might be used to.

Apparently I handled it right. It perked up considerably and, as I moved about, the coffee-cup-sized pod on the top kept turning, following every move I made.

I watched it for a while and moved the sunlamp back a little, so there'd be no chance of scorching it, and went back into the house.

It was then that I really began to get bone-scared. I had been frightened out in the shed, of course, but that had been shock. Now, thinking it over, I began to understand more clearly what sort of creature I'd found underneath the hedge. I remember I wasn't yet ready to say it out loud, but it seemed probable that my guest was an alien intelligence.

I did some wondering about how it had gotten here and if it had made the holes in Banker Stevens' flowerbed and also if it could have had anything to do with the big hole out in Pete Skinner's north forty.

I sat around, arguing with myself, for a man just does not go prowling around in his neighbor's garden after midnight.

But I had to know.

I WALKED up the alley to the back of the Stevens house and sneaked into the garden. Shielding the flashlight with my hat, I had another look at the holes in the ruined flowerbed. I wasn't too surprised when I saw that they occurred in series of eight, four to the side—exactly the kind of holes the plant back in my toolshed would make if it sank its roots into the ground.

I counted at least eleven of those eight-in-line sets of holes and I'm sure that there were more. But I didn't want to stick around too long, for fear Banker Stevens might wake up and ask questions.

So I went back home, down the alley, and was just in time to catch that garbage-stealing dog doing a good job on the can. He had his head stuck clear down into it and I was able to sneak up behind him. He heard me and struggled to get out, but he'd jammed himself into the can. Before he could get loose, I landed a good swift kick where it did maximum good. He set some kind of canine speed record in getting



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off the premises, I imagine.

I went to the toolshed and opened the door. The tub half full of muddy water was still there and the sunlamp was still burning—but the plant was gone. I looked all over the shed and couldn't find it. So I unplugged the sunlamp and headed for the house.

To be truthful, I was a little relieved that the plant had wandered off.

But when I rounded the corner of the house, I saw it hadn't. It was in the window box, and the geraniums I had nursed all spring were hanging limply over the side of the box.

I stood there and looked at it and had the feeling that it was looking back at me.

And I remembered that not only had it had to travel from the toolshed to the house and then climb into the window box, but it had had to open the toolshed door and close it again.

It was standing up, stiff and straight, and appeared to be in the best of health. It looked thoroughly incongruous in the window box—as if a man had grown a tall stalk of corn there, although it didn't look anything like a stalk of corn.

I got a pail of water and poured it into the window box. Then I felt something tapping me on the head and looked up. The plant had bent over and was patting me with one of its branches. The modified leaf at the end of the branch had spread itself out to do the patting and looked something like a hand.

I went into the house and up to bed and the main thing I was thinking about was that, if the plant got too troublesome or dangerous, all I had to do was mix a strong dose of commercial fertilizer or arsenic, or something just as deadly, and water it with the mixture.

Believe it or not, I went to sleep.

NEXT morning, I got to thinking that maybe I should repair the old greenhouse and put my guest in there and be sure to keep the door locked. It seemed to be reasonably friendly and inoffensive, but I couldn't be sure, of course.

After breakfast, I went out into the yard to look for it, with the idea of locking it in the garage for the day, but it wasn't in the window box, or anywhere that I could see. And since it was Saturday, when a lot of farmers came to town, with some of them sure to be dropping in to see me, I didn't want to be late to work.

I was fairly busy during the day and didn't have much time for thinking or worrying. But when I was wrapping up the sam-



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ple of soil from the banker's garden to send to the Soils Bureau, I wondered if maybe there wasn't someone at the university I should notify. I also wondered about letting someone in Washington know, except I didn't have the least idea whom to contact, or even which department.

Coming home that evening, I found the plant anchored in the garden, in a little space where the radishes and lettuce had been. The few lettuce plants still left in the ground were looking sort of limp, but everything else was all right. I took a good look at the plant. It waved a couple of its branches at me—and it wasn't the wind blowing them, for there wasn't any wind—and it nodded its coffee-cup pod as if to let me know it recognized me. But that was all it did.

AFTER supper, I scouted the hedge in front of the house and found two more of the plants. Both of them were dead.

My next-door neighbors had gone to a movie, so I scouted their place, too, and found four more of the plants, under bushes and in corners where they had crawled away to die.

I wondered whether it might not have been the plant I'd rescued that the dogs had been barking at the night before. I felt fairly sure it was. A dog might be able to recognize an alien being where a man would be unable to.

I counted up. At least seven of the things had picked out Banker Stevens' flowerbed for a meal and the chemical fertilizer he used had killed all but one of them. The sole survivor, then, was out in the garden, killing off my lettuce.

I wondered why the lettuce and geraniums and Stevens' flowers had reacted as they did. It might be that the alien plants produced some sort of poison, which they injected into the soil to discourage other plant life from crowding their feeding grounds. That was not exactly far-fetched. There are trees and plants on Earth that accomplish the same thing by various methods. Or it might be that the aliens sucked the soil so dry of moisture and plant-food that the other plants simply starved to death.

I did some wondering on why they'd come to Earth at all and why some of them had stayed. If they had traveled from some other planet, they must have come in a ship, so that hole out in Pete's north forty might have been where they stopped to replenish their food supply, dumping the equivalent of garbage beside the hole.

And what about the seven I had counted?



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COULD they have jumped ship? Or gone on shore leave and run into trouble, the way human sailors often do?

Maybe the ship had searched for the missing members of the party, had been unable to find them, and had gone on. If that were so, then my own plant was a marooned alien. Or maybe the ship was still hunting.

I wore myself out, thinking about it, and went to bed early, but lay there tossing for a long time. Then, just as I was falling asleep, I heard the dog at the garbage can. You'd think after what had happened to him the night before, that he'd have decided to skip that particular can, but not him. He was rattling and banging it around, trying to tip it over.

I picked a skillet off the stove and opened the back door. I got a good shot at him, but missed him by a good ten feet. I was so sore that I didn't even go out to pick up the skillet, but went back to bed.

It must have been several hours later that I was brought straight up in bed by the terror-stricken yelping of a dog. I jumped out and ran to the window. It was a bright moonlit night and the dog was going down the driveway as if the devil himself were after him. Behind him sailed the plant. It had wrapped one of its branches around his tail and the other three branches were really giving him a working over.

They went up the street out of sight and, for a long time after they disappeared, I could hear the dog still yelping. Within a few minutes, I saw the plant coming up the gravel, walking like a spider on its eight roots.

It turned off the driveway and planted itself beside a lilac bush and seemed to settle down for the night. I decided that if it wasn't good for anything else, the garbage can would be safe, at least. If the dog came back again, the plant would be waiting to put the bee on him.

I lay awake for a long time, wondering how the plant had known I didn't want the dog raiding the garbage. It probably had seen—if that is the proper word—me chase him out of the yard.

I went to sleep with the comfortable feeling that the plant and I had finally begun to understand each other.

THE next day was Sunday and I started working on the greenhouse, putting it into shape so I could cage up the plant. It had found itself a sunny spot in the garden and was imitating a large and particularly ugly weed I'd been too lazy to pull out.

My next-door neighbor came over to offer free advice, but he kept shifting uneasily and I knew



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there was something on his mind.

Finally he came out with it. "Funny thing—Jenny swears she saw a big plant walking around in your yard the other day. The kid saw it, too, and he claims it chased him." He tittered a little, embarrassed. "You know how kids are."

"Sure," I said.

He stood around a while longer and gave me some more advice, then went across the yard and home.

I worried about what he had told me. If the plant really had taken to chasing kids, there'd be hell to pay.

I worked at the greenhouse all day long, but there was a lot to do, for it had been out of use ten years or more, and by nightfall I was tuckered out.

After supper, I went out on the back stoop and sat on the steps, watching the stars. It was quiet and restful.

I hadn't been there more than fifteen minutes when I heard a rustling. I looked around and there was the plant, coming up out of the garden, walking along on its roots.

It sort of squatted down beside me and the two of us just sat there, looking at the stars. Or, at least, I looked at them. I don't actually know if the plant could see. If it couldn't, it had some other faculty that was just as good as sight. We just sat there.

After a while, the plant moved one of its branches over and took hold of my arm with that hand-like leaf. I tensed a bit, but its touch was gentle enough and I sat still, figuring that if the two of us were to get along, we couldn't start out by flinching away from one another.

Then, so gradually that at first I didn't notice it, I began to perceive a sense of gratitude, as if the plant might be thanking me. I looked around to see what it was doing and it wasn't doing a thing, just sitting there as I was, but with its "hand" still on my arm.

Yet in some way, the plant was trying to make me understand that it was grateful to me for saving it.

IT formed no words, you understand. Other than rustling its leaves, it couldn't make a sound. But I understood that some system of communication was in operation. No words, but emotion—deep, clear, utterly sincere emotion.

It eventually got a little embarrassing, this non-stop gratitude.

"Oh, that's all right," I said, trying to put an end to it. "You would have done as much for me."

Somehow, the plant must have sensed that its thanks had been



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accepted, because the gratitude wore off a bit and something else took over—a sense of peace and quiet.

The plant got up and started to walk off and I called out to it, "Hey, Plant, wait a minute!"

It seemed to understand that I had called it back, for it turned around. I took it by a branch and started to lead it around the boundaries of the yard. If this communication business was going to be any good, you see, it had to go beyond the sense of gratitude and peace and quiet. So I led the plant all the way around the yard and I kept thinking at it as hard as I could, telling it not to go beyond that perimeter.

By the time I'd finished, I was wringing wet with effort. But, finally, the plant seemed to be trying to say okay. Then I built up a mental image of it chasing a kid and I shook a mental finger at it. The plant agreed. I tried to tell it not to move around the yard in daylight, when people would be able to see it. Whether the concept was harder or I was getting tired, I don't know, but both the plant and I were limp when it at last indicated that it understood.

Lying in bed that night, I thought a lot about this problem of communication. It was not telepathy, apparently, but something based on mental pictures and emotions.

But I saw it as my one chance. If I could learn to converse, no matter how, and the plant could learn to communicate something beyond abstracts to me, it could talk to people, would be acceptable and believable, and the authorities might be willing to recognize it as an intelligent being. I decided that the best thing to do would be to acquaint it with the way we humans lived and try to make it understand why we lived that way. And since I couldn't take my visitor outside the yard, I'd have to do it inside.

I went to sleep, chuckling at the idea of my house and yard being a classroom for an alien.

THE next day, I received a phone call from the Soils Bureau at the university.

"What kind of stuff is this you're sending us?" the man demanded.

"Just some soil I picked up," I said. "What's wrong with it?"

"Sample One is all right. It's just common, everyday Burton County soil. But Sample Two, that sand—good God, man, it has gold dust and flakes of silver and some copper in it! All of it in minute particles, of course. But if some farmer out your way has a pit of that stuff, he's rich."

"At the most, he has twenty-



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five or thirty truckloads of it."

"Where'd he get it? Where'd it come from?"

I took a deep breath and told him all I knew about the incident out at Pete's north forty.

He said he'd be right out, but I caught him before he hung up and asked him about the third sample.

"What was he growing on that ground?" the man asked baffledly. "Nothing I know of could suck it that clean, right down to the bare bone! Tell him to put in a lot of organic material and some lime and almost everything else that's needed in good soil, before he tries to use it."

The Soils people came out to Pete's place and they brought along some other men from the university. A little later in the week, after the papers had spelled out big headlines, a couple of men from Washington showed up. But no one seemed able to figure it out and they finally gave up. The newspapers gave it a play and dropped it as soon as the experts did.

During that time, curiosity seekers flocked to the farm to gape at the hole and the pile of sand. They had carried off more than half the sand and Pete was madder than hell about the whole business.

"I'm going to fill in that hole and forget all about it," he told me, and that was what he did.

Meanwhile, at home, the situation was progressing. Plant seemed to understand what I had told him about not moving out of the yard and acting like a weed during the daytime and leaving kids alone. Everything was peaceable and I got no more complaints. Best of all, the garbage-stealing dog never showed his snout again.

Several times, during all the excitement out at Pete's place, I had been tempted to tell someone from the university about Plant. In each case, I decided not to, for we weren't getting along too well in the talk department.

But in other ways, we were doing just fine.

I LET Plant watch me while I took an electric motor apart and then put it together again, but I wasn't too sure he knew what it was all about. I tried to show him the concept of mechanical power and I demonstrated how the motor would deliver that power and I tried to tell him what electricity was. But I got all bogged down with that, not knowing too much about it myself. I don't honestly think Plant got a thing out of that electric motor.

With the motor of the car, though, we were more successful. We spent one whole Sunday dismantling it and then putting it back together. Watching what I



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was doing, Plant seemed to take a lot of interest in it.

We had to keep the garage door locked and it was a scorcher of a day and, anyhow, I'd much rather spend a Sunday fishing than tearing down a motor. I wondered a dozen times if it was worth it, if there might not be easier ways to teach Plant the facts of our Earth culture.

I was all tired out and failed to hear the alarm and woke up an hour later than I should. I jumped into my clothes, ran out to the garage, unlocked the door and there was Plant. He had parts from that motor strewn all over the floor and he was working away at it, happy as a clam. I almost took an axe to him, but I got hold of myself in time. I locked the door behind me and walked to work.

All day, I wondered how Plant had gotten into the garage. Had he sneaked back in the night before, when I wasn't looking, or had he been able to pick the lock? I wondered, too, what sort of shape I'd find the car in when I got home. I could just see myself working half the night, putting it back together.

I left work a little early. If I had to work on the car, I wanted an early start.

When I got home, the motor was all assembled and Plant was out in the garden, acting like a weed. Seeing him there, I realized he knew how to unlock the door, for I'd locked it when I left that morning.

I turned on the ignition, making bets with myself that it wouldn't start. But it did. I rode around town a little to check it and there wasn't a thing wrong with it.

FOR the next lesson, I tried something simpler. I got my carpentry tools and showed them to Plant and let him watch me while I made a bird house. Not that I needed any more bird houses. The place already crawled with them. But it was the easiest, quickest thing I could think of to show Plant how we worked in wood.

He watched closely and seemed to understand what was going on, all right, but I detected a sadness in him. I put my hand on his arm to ask him what was the matter.

All that I got was a mournful reaction.

It bewildered me. Why should Plant take so much interest in monkeying around with a motor and then grieve at the making of a bird house? I didn't get it figured out until a few days later, when Plant saw me picking a bouquet of flowers for the kitchen table.

And then it hit me.



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PLANT was a plant and flowers were plants and so was lumber, or at least lumber at one time had been a plant. And I stood there, with the bouquet dangling in my hand and Plant looking at me, and I thought of all the shocks he had in store for him when he found out more about us—how we slaughtered our forests, grew plants for food and clothing, squeezed or boiled drugs from them.

It was just like a human going to another planet, I realized, and finding that some alien life form grew humans for food.

Plant didn't seem to be sore at me nor did he shrink from me in horror. He was just sad. When he got sad, he was the saddest-looking thing you could possibly imagine. A bloodhound with a hangover would have looked positively joyous in comparison.

If we ever had gotten to the point where we could have really talked—about things like ethics and philosophy, I mean—I might have learned just how Plant felt about our plant-utilizing culture. I'm sure he tried to tell me, but I couldn't understand much of what he was driving at.

We were sitting out on the steps one night, looking at the stars. Earlier, Plant had been showing me his home planet, or it may have been some of the planets he had visited. I don't know. All I could get were fuzzy mental pictures and reactions. One place was hot and red, another blue and cold. There was another that had all the colors of the rainbow and a cool, restful feel about it, as if there might have been gentle winds and fountains and bird-songs in the twilight.

We had been sitting there for quite a while when he put his hand back on my arm again and he showed me a plant. He must have put considerable effort into getting me to visualize it, for the image was sharp and clear. It was a scraggy, rundown plant and it looked even sadder than Plant looked when he got sad, if that is possible. When I started feeling sorry for it, he began to think of kindness and, when he thought of things like kindness and sadness and gratitude and happiness, he could really pour it on.

He had me thinking such big, kindly thoughts, I was afraid that I would burst. While I sat there, thinking that way, I saw the plant begin to perk up. It grew and flowered and was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. It matured its seeds and dropped them. Swiftly, little plants sprang from the seeds and they were healthy and full of ginger, too.

I mulled that one over several days, suspecting I was crazy for even thinking what I did. I tried to shrug it off, but it wouldn't



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shrug. It gave me an idea.

The only way I could get rid of it was to try it out.

OUT in back of the toolshed was the sorriest yellow rose in town. Why it clung to life, year after year, I could never figure out. It had been there ever since I was a boy. The only reason it hadn't been dug up and thrown away long ago was that no one had ever needed the ground it was rooted in.

I thought, if a plant ever needed help, that yellow rose was it.

So I sneaked out back of the toolshed, making sure that Plant didn't see me, and stood in front of that yellow rose. I began to think kindly thoughts about it, although God knows it was hard to think kindly toward such a wretched thing. I felt foolish and hoped none of the neighbors spotted me, but I kept at it. I didn't seem to accomplish much to start with, but I went back, time after time. In a week or so, I got so that I just naturally loved that yellow rose to pieces.

After four or five days, I began to see some change in it. At the end of two weeks, it had developed from a scraggy, no-account bush to one that any rose fancier would have been proud to own. It dropped its bug-chewed leaves and grew new ones that were so shiny, they looked as if they were waxed. Then it grew big flower buds and, in no time at all, was a blaze of yellow glory.

But I didn't quite believe it. In the back of my mind, I figured that Plant must have seen me doing it and helped along a bit. So I decided to test the process again where he couldn't interfere.

Millie had been trying for a couple of years to grow an African violet in a flower pot at the office. By this time, even she was willing to admit it was a losing battle. I had made a lot of jokes about the violet and, at times, Millie had been sore at me about it. Like the yellow rose, it was a hard-luck plant. The bugs ate it. Millie forgot to water it. It got knocked onto the floor. Visitors used it for an ashtray.

Naturally, I couldn't give it the close, intensive treatment I'd given the rose, but I made a point to stop for a few minutes every day beside the violet and think good things about it and, in a couple of weeks, it perked up considerably. By the end of the month, it had bloomed for the first time in its life.

Meanwhile, Plant's education continued.

At first, he'd balked at entering the house, but finally trusted me enough to go in. He didn't spend much time there, for the house was too full of reminders that ours was a plant-utilizing



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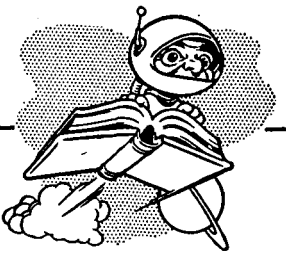
culture. Furniture, clothing, cereal, paper — even the house itself—all were made of vegetation. I got an old butter tub and filled it with soil and put it in one corner of the dining room, so he could eat in the house if he wanted to, but I don't remember that he even once took a snack out of that tub.

ALTHOUGH I didn't admit it then, I knew that what Plant and I had tried to do had been a failure. Whether someone else might have done better, I don't know. I suspect he might have. But I didn't know how to go about getting in touch and I was afraid of being laughed at. It's a terrible thing, our human fear of ridicule.

And there was Plant to consider, too. How would he take being passed on to someone else? I'd screw up my courage to do something about it, and then Plant would come up out of the garden and sit beside me on the steps, and we'd talk—not about anything that mattered, really, but about happiness and sadness and brotherhood, and my courage would go glimmering and I'd have to start all over again.

I've since thought how much like two lost children we must have been, strange kids raised in different countries, who would have liked to play together, ex-

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cept neither knew the rules for the other's games or spoke the other's language.

I know . . . I know. According to common sense, you begin with mathematics. You show the alien that you know two and two are four. Then you draw the Solar System and show him the Sun on the diagram and then point to the Sun overhead and you point to Earth on the diagram, then point to yourself. In this way, you demonstrate to him that you know about the Solar System and about space and the stars and so on.

Then you hand him the paper and the pencil.

But what if he doesn't know mathematics? What if the two plus - two - makes - four routine doesn't mean a thing to him? What if he's never seen a drawing? What if he can't draw—or see or hear or feel or think the way you do?

To deal with an alien, you've got to get down to basics.

And maybe math isn't basic.

Maybe diagrams aren't.

In that case, you have to search for something that is.

Yet there must be certain universal basics.

I think I know what they are.

That, if nothing else, Plant taught me.

Happiness is basic. And sadness is basic. And gratitude, in perhaps a lesser sense. Kindness, too. And perhaps hatred—although Plant and I never dealt in that.

Maybe brotherhood. For the sake of humanity, I hope so.

But kindness and happiness and brotherhood are awkward tools to use in reaching specific understanding, although in Plant's world, they may not be.

IT was getting on toward autumn and I was beginning to wonder how I'd take care of Plant during the winter months.

I could have kept him in the house, but he hated it there.

Then, one night, we were sitting on the back steps, listening to the first crickets of the season.

The ship came down without a sound. I didn't see it until it was about at treetop level. It floated down and landed between the house and toolshed.

I was startled for a moment, but not frightened, and perhaps not too surprised. In the back of my head, I'd wondered all the time, without actually knowing it, whether Plant's pals might not ultimately find him.

The ship was a shimmery sort of thing, as if it might not have been made of metal and was not really solid. I noticed that it had not really landed, but floated a foot or so above the grass.

Three other Plants stepped out and the oddest part of it was that



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there wasn't any door. They just came out of the ship and the ship closed behind them.

Plant took me by the arm and twitched it just a little, to make me understand he wanted me to walk with him to the ship. He made little comforting thoughts to try to calm me down.

And all the time that this was going on, I could sense the talk between Plant and those other three—but just grasping the fringe of the conversation, barely knowing there was talk, not aware of what was being said.

And then, while Plant stood beside me, with his hand still on my arm, those other plants walked up. One by one, each took me by the other arm and stood facing me for a moment and told me thanks and happiness.

Plant told me the same, for the last time, and then the four of them walked toward the ship and disappeared into it. The ship left me standing there, watching it rise into the night, until I couldn't see it any longer.

I stood there for a long time, staring up into the sky, with the thanks and happiness fading and loneliness beginning to creep in.

I knew that, somewhere up there, was a larger ship, that in it were many other Plants, that one of them had lived with me for almost six months and that others of them had died in the hedges


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and fence corners of the neighborhood. I knew also that it had been the big ship that had scooped out the load of nutritious soil from Pete Skinner's field.

FINALLY, I stopped looking at the sky. Over behind the toolshed, I saw the whiteness of the yellow rose in bloom and once again I thought about the basics.

I wondered if happiness and kindness, perhaps even emotions that we humans do not know, might not be used on Plant's world as we use the sciences.

For the rose bush had bloomed when I thought kindly thoughts of it. And the African violet had found a new life in the kindness of a human.

Startling as it may seem, foolish as it may sound, it is not an unknown phenomenon. There are people who have the knack of getting the most out of a flowerbed or a garden. And it is said of these people that they have green thumbs.

May it not be that *green thumbness* is not so much concerned with skill or how much care is taken of a plant, as with the kindliness and the interest of the person tending it?

For eons, the plant life of this planet has been taken for granted. It is simply there. By and large, plants are given little affection. They are planted or sown. They grow. In proper season, they are harvested.

I sometimes wonder if, as hunger tightens its grip upon our teeming planet, there may not be a vital need for the secret of *green thumbness*.

If kindness and sympathy can cause a plant to produce beyond its normal wont, then shouldn't we consider kindness as a tool to ward off Earth's hunger? How much more might be produced if the farmer loved his wheat?

It's silly, of course, a principle that could not gain acceptance.

And undoubtedly it would not work—not in a plant-utilizing culture.

For how could you keep on convincing a plant that you feel kindly toward it when, season after season, you prove that your only interest in it is to eat it or make it into clothing or chop it down for lumber?

I walked out back of the shed and stood beside the yellow rose, trying to find the answer. The yellow rose stirred, like a pretty woman who knows she's being admired, but no emotion came from it.

The thanks and happiness were gone. There was nothing left but the loneliness.

Damned vegetable aliens—upsetting a man so he couldn't eat his breakfast cereal in peace!

—CLIFFORD D. SIMAK



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# What Rough Beast?

By JEFFERSON HIGHE

*When you are a teacher, you expect kids to play pranks. But with tigers—and worse?*

STANDING braced — or, as it seemed to him, crucified —against the length of the blackboard, John Ward tried to calculate his chances of heading off the impending riot. It didn't seem likely that anything he could do would stop it.

"Say something," he told himself. "Continue the lecture, *talk*!" But against the background of hysterical voices from the school yard, against the brass fear in his mouth, he was dumb. He looked at the bank of boys' faces in front of him. They seemed to him now as identical as metal stampings, each one completely deadpan, each pair of jaws moving in a single rhythm, like a mechanical herd. He could feel the tension in them, and he knew that, in a

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS



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moment, they would begin to move. He felt shame and humiliation that he had failed.

"Shakespeare," he said clearly, holding his voice steady, "for those of you who have never heard of him, was the greatest of all dramatists. Greater even," he went on doggedly, knowing that they might take it as a provocation, "than the writers for the Spellcasts." He stopped talking abruptly.

THREE tigers stepped out of the ceiling. Their eyes were glassy, absolutely rigid, as if, like the last of the hairy mammoths, they had been frozen a long age in some glacial crevasse. They hung there a moment and then fell into the room like a furry waterfall. They landed snarling.

Something smashed viciously into the wall beside Ward's head. From the back of the room, someone's hand flashed a glitter of light. Ward leaped away and cut across the end of the room toward the escape chute. Holding his ring with its identifying light beam before him, he leaped into the slot like a racing driver. Behind him, the room exploded in shouts and snarls. The gate on the chute slammed shut after him, and he heard them scratching and banging at it. Without the identifying light, they would be unable to get through. He took a long breath of relief as he shot down the polished groove of the slide into the Mob Quad. The boys he'd left behind knew how to protect themselves.

They were all there—Dr. Allenby, McCarthy the psych man, Laura Ames the pretty gym teacher, Foster, Jensen — all of them. So it had been general then, not just his group which had rioted. He knew it was all the more serious now, because it had not been limited to one outbreak.

"You, too, Ward?" Dr. Allenby said sadly. He was a short, slender man with white hair and a white mustache. He helped Ward up from where he had fallen at the foot of the escape slide. "What was it in your classroom this time?"

"Tigers," Ward said. Standing beside Allenby, he felt very tall, although he was only of average height. He smoothed down his wiry dark hair and began energetically brushing the dust from his clothing.

"Well, it's always something," Allenby said tiredly.

He seemed more sad than upset, Ward thought, a spent old man clinging to the straw of a dream. He saw where the metaphor was leading and pushed it aside. If Allenby were a drown-



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ing man, then Ward himself was one. He looked at the others.

THEY were all edgy or simply frightened, but they were taking it very well. Some of them were stationed at the gates of the Quad, but none of them, as far as he could see, was armed. Except for McCarthy. The psych man was wearing his Star Watcher helmet and had a B-gun strapped at his side. Probably had a small force-field in his pocket, Ward thought, *and* a pair of brass knuckles.

"So—the philosophy king got it too," McCarthy said, coming over to them. He was a big man, young but already florid with what Ward had always thought of as a roan complexion. "Love, understanding, sympathy—wasn't that what was supposed to work wonders? All they need is a copy of Robinson Crusoe and a chance to follow their natural instincts, eh?"

"One failure doesn't prove anything," Ward said, trying not to be angry.

"*One* failure? How often do they have to make us hit the slides for the safety of the Mob Quad before you adopt a sensible theory?"

"Let's not go through all that again. Restraint, Rubber hoses and Radiological shock — I've heard all about the 3 Rs."

"At least they work!"

"Oh, yes, they work fine. Except that they never learn to read and they can't sign their names with anything but an X."

"It was progressive education that destroyed reading," McCarthy said heatedly. "And they don't *need* to sign their names—that's what universal fingerprinting is for."

"Please, gentlemen," Dr. Allenby interrupted gently. "This kind of squabbling is unbecoming to members of the faculty. Besides," he smiled with faded irony, "considering the circumstances, it's hardly a proper time."

He pointed to the windows over the Quad where an occasional figure could be seen behind the glass. Lucky it was unbreakable, Ward thought, hearing the wild hysterical yelling from inside.

"Mob Quad," Allenby said bitterly. "I thought I was naming it as a joke. The original Mob Quad was at Merton College, Oxford. One of the old defunct universities. *They* had a Mob Quad to shelter students and professors from the town mobs. Professors *and* students, gentlemen—they were a united front in those days. I suppose no one could have predicted our present circumstances."

"That's all history," McCarthy said impatiently. "Bunk. This is *now*, and I say the thing to do—"



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"We know." Allenby waved him to silence. "But your way has been tried long enough. How long is it since Los Angeles Day, when the U.N. buildings were bombed and burned by the original 3R Party in order to get rid of Unesco? Two hundred forty-three years next June, isn't it? And your Party had had all that time to get education back on what it calls a sane program. Now *nobody* is educated."

"It takes time to undo the damage of progressive education," McCarthy said. "Besides, a lot of that junk — reading, writing — as I've often told Ward—"

"All right," Ward broke in. "But two and a half centuries is long enough. Someone must try a new tack or the country is doomed. There isn't much time. The Outspace invaders—"

"The Outspace invaders are simply Russians," McCarthy said flatly.

"That's a convenient view if you're an ostrich. Or, if you want to keep the Pretend War going, until the Outspacers take us over."

McCARTHY snorted contemptuously. "Ward, you damned fool—"

"That will be all, gentlemen," Allenby said. He did not raise his voice, but McCarthy was silent and Ward marveled, as he had on other occasions, at the authority the old man carried.

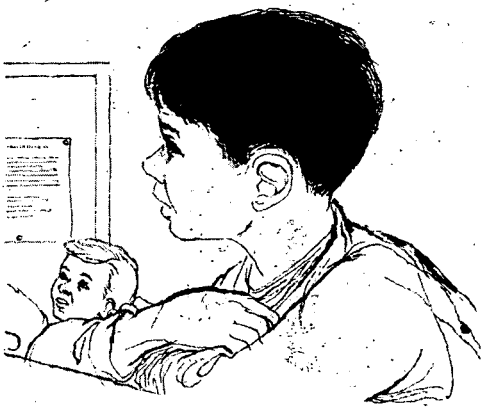
"Well," McCarthy said after a moment, "what are you going to do about *this?*" He gestured toward the windows from which shouts still rang.

"Nothing. Let it run its course."

"But you can't do *that,* man!"

"I can and I will. What do you think, John?"

"I agree," Ward said. "They won't hurt each other — they never have yet. It'll wear itself out and then, tomorrow, we'll try again." He did not feel optimistic about how things would be the next day, but he didn't want to voice his fears. "The thing that worries me," he said, "are those





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tigers. Where'd they come from?"

"What tigers?" McCarthy wanted to know.

Ward told him.

"First it was cats," McCarthy said, "then birds . . . now tigers. Either you're seeing things or someone's using a concealed projector."

"I thought of the projector, but these seemed real. Stunned at first—as if they were as surprised as I was."

"You have a teleport in your class," Allenby said.

"Yes—maybe that's the way it was done. I don't know quite what to make of it," Ward said. If he voiced his real suspicion now, he knew it would sound silly. "I know some of them can teleport. I've seen them. Small things, of course . . ."

"Not in *my* classes," McCarthy said indignantly. "I absolutely forbid that sort of thing."

"You do wrong, then," Allenby said.

"It's unscientific!"

"Perhaps. But we want to encourage whatever wild talents they possess."

"So that they can materialize tigers in—in our bedrooms, I suppose. Well, I've had enough. Stay here and stew if you like, but I'm going back to my class. I turned the hypno-gas on them before I took my dive. They should be nice and gentle for me by this time." He turned away defiantly.

"I know how you feel," Allenby said when McCarthy was gone. "He's a holy terror, John. Shouldn't be around here. But I have to keep him, since he was recommended by the 3Rs and the Educational League. He gives the school a bit of protective coloration. Perhaps he's why they haven't closed us down yet."

"I know—I'm not blaming you. Do you suppose we can go back to our jobs? It sounds as if it's wearing itself out." He gestured up at the windows.

"Can't do anything more today."

"No, you're probably right."

FOR a moment Allenby was silent as they went toward the gate of the Quad. Then he said, "John, you're a good man. I don't want you to despair. What we're attempting—to bring education back into our culture—is a good and noble cause. And you can't really blame the kids." He nodded up at the walls. "They've just had too many Spellcasts, too many scares in the Pretend War—they can't believe in any future and they don't know anything about their past. Don't blame them."

"No, sir—I don't."

"Just do our best," Allenby said. "Try to teach them the forgotten things. Then, in their turn,



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in the next generation . . ."

"Yes, we have to believe that. But, Dr. Allenby, we could go a lot faster if we were to screen them. If they were all like young Tomkins, we'd be doing very well. But as long as we have people like young Cress or Hodge or Rottke—well, it's hard to do anything with them. They go straight from school into their fathers' firms—after all, if you're guaranteed a business success in life, you don't struggle to learn. And, anyway, you don't need much education to be a dope salesman or a numbers consultant."

"I'd like to have the place run only for the deserving and the interested," Allenby said. "But we haven't much choice. We must have some of these boys who are from the best families. More protective coloration — like McCarthy. If we were only to run the place for the brilliant ones, you know we'd be closed down in a week."

"I suppose so," Ward agreed. He wondered whether he should tell his suspicions to Allenby. Better not, he decided. Allenby had enough to think about.

The last of the shouting had died. As Ward went out the gate of the Quad, he felt his heart lift a little the way it always did when he started for home. Out here, miles from the city, the air was clean and the Sun was bright on the hills, quilted now with the colors of autumn. There was a tang of wood smoke in the air and, in the leaves beside the path, he saw an apple. It was very cold and damp and there was a wild taste to it as he bit into the fruit. He was a tired teacher, glad to be going home after a hard day in the school. He hoped that no one had been hurt by the tigers.

JOHN WARD pushed the papers across his desk, reached for his pipe and sighed. "Well, that does it, Bobby," he said.

He looked at the red-headed six-year-old boy sitting in the too-big chair across from him. Bobby was a small boy with a freckled face and skinned knees. He sat in the big chair with his feet sticking straight out in front of him and played with a slide rule.

"I've taught you all the math I know," Ward said. "Differential, integral, topology, Maddow's Theory of Transfinite Domains —that's as far as I go. What's next?"

"I don't know, John. I was thinking of going in for nuclear physics, but . . ."

"Go on, but what?" Ward prompted.

"Well . . ." Bobby gave him an embarrassed look. "I'm kind of tired of that stuff. It's easy and not very interesting. What


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I'd really like—" He broke off and began fiddling with the slide rule again.

"Yes, Bobby, what would you like?"

"You won't be mad?"

"No." Ward smiled.

"Well, I'd really like to try to write a poem—a real poem, I mean, not advertiverse—a real poem, with rhymes and everything." He paused and looked to see how Ward was taking it and then went on with a rush. "I know it's almost illegal, but I want to try. I really want to."

"But why?"

"Oh, I dunno — I just want to. I remember that an old poet named Yeats said something about writing poems — the fascination with what's difficult. Maybe that's it."

"Well," Ward said, "it's a dangerous occupation." He looked at the boy with wonder and pride. "Sure, Bobby, give it a try if you want to."

"Gee, thanks!" the boy said. He jumped out of the chair and started toward the door of the study.

"Bobby," Ward called. "Tell me—can you teleport?"

"Not exactly," Bobby said. The papers on the desk in front of Ward suddenly fluttered into the air. They did a lazy circle of the room, swung into an echelon and performed a slow chandelle, before dropping into Bobby's hand. "I can do that stuff. But I didn't do the tigers."

"I'm sure you didn't."

"It was a good stunt, but I wouldn't do that to you, John."

"I know. Do you know who did?"

"I'm not sure." Bobby didn't look at him now. "Anyway, it'd be snitching."

"I'm not asking you to tell."

"Gee, I'm sorry," Bobby said. "I wanted to tell you in the yard. I knew there was going to be a rumble, but I couldn't snitch."

"No, of course not." Ward shooed him off. "Go write your poem."

"BUT tigers!" Ann said. "Why tigers, John?"

"I suppose they were convenient."

"Tigers are never convenient."

He crossed the room, picked up the phone and dialed. After a brief conversation, he turned back to her. "Well, now we know where they came from," he said. "The zoo. Disappeared for about half an hour. Then reappeared again."

"I don't care where they came from," his wife said. Her dark head was bent over some work in her lap. "What difference does it make whether they came from the zoo or from Burma? The



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point is, bringing them in is dangerous — it's hooliganism, and don't tell me that boys will be boys."

"It doesn't show very mature judgment," he admitted. "But Bobby and his pals aren't very old."

"Only about four hundred and eighty-five years old, according to his I.Q. Do you think it was Bobby?"

"Bobby isn't the only genius we've got. There's Danny, remember, and William Tender—and Bobby said he couldn't teleport big stuff."

"Well?"

John Ward had to confide his theory. He felt that he had to tell Ann everything, all the speculation and suspicion he'd carried around with him for so long.

"I think we're being invaded," he said.

Ann looked at him steadily for a moment. "You mean the Outspacers?"

"Yes — but not in the way you're thinking. It's been reported that the Saucers are Russian or Argentine or Brazilian or Chinese — that's what we're told. But that's simply Pretend War propaganda and almost no one believes it any longer. Most of us think of them as Outspacers."

"And you think they're moving in?"

"I think they're watching—sort of—well, sort of monitoring."

"Monitoring us? What for?"

"No, not us. I think they've planted children among us. I think the Outspacers are *schoolteachers*."

Ann got briskly to her feet. "I think," she said, "that we'll take your temperature and see if perhaps you shouldn't be in bed."

"WAIT, Ann, I'm serious. I know it sounds crazy, but it isn't. Think of it this way—here's a race, obviously humanoid, on another star system. For some reason, overpopulation or whatever, they have to find room on another planet. Let's assume they're a highly civilized race—they'd have to be to have interstellar travel—so, of course, they can't simply take over Earth in an act of aggression. That would be repugnant to them.

"So they *seed* our planet with their children. These children are geniuses. When they grow up, they are naturally the leaders of the world's governments and they're in a position to allow the Outspacers to live with us on Earth. To live peacefully with us, whereas now, if the Outspacers were to try to live here, it would mean war."

"And you think Bobby is one of these—these seedlings?"

"Maybe. He's unbelievingly intelligent. *And* he's a foundling."



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"What has that to do with it?"

"I've looked up the statistics on foundlings. When the Saucers first began to appear, back in the 20th Century, the number of foundlings began to increase. Not a lot, but some. Then the Saucers disappeared for almost two and a half centuries and the number decreased. Now, since the Outspacers are once more evident, the number of foundlings has increased very greatly."

"And your other geniuses? All foundlings?"

"Not all. But that doesn't mean anything — plenty of foundlings are adopted. And who knows which child is an adopted one?"

Ann Ward sat down again. "You're quite serious about this, John?"

"There's no way of being sure, but I am convinced."

"It's frightening."

"Is Bobby frightening? In all the time I've been tutoring him, has he ever been out of line?"

"Bobby's no alien!"

"He may be."

"Well, anyway, of course Bobby isn't frightening. But that business of the tigers—*that* is!"

"They didn't hurt anyone."

"No, but don't you see, John? It's — irresponsible. How do you fit it in with your super-intelligent super-beings?"

"Ann," he said impatiently, "we're dealing with fantastically intelligent beings, but beings who are still *children*—can't you understand that? They're just finding out their powers—one is a telepath, another levitates, a third is a teleport. A riot is started by Alec Cress or Jacky Hodge or one of those 3R hoodlums. And our child genius can't resist making a kind of joke of his own."

"Joke? With *tigers*? John, I tell you I'm frightened." Her husband said nothing and she looked at him sharply. "You *hope* it's this way, don't you?"

FOR a moment he didn't answer. Then he sighed. "Yes. Yes, I do both believe and hope I'm right, Ann. I never thought that I'd be willing to give up the struggle — that's what it amounts to. But I don't think the human race can manage itself any more. So, I'm willing and glad to have some other race teach us how to live. I know we've always looked on the idea of domination by some race from the stars with both terror and revulsion. But we've made such a mess of things on Earth that I, at least, would be glad to see them come."

After a while, Ann said, "I've got to do some shopping for supper."

She began mechanically putting her work away.

"You're shocked?"

"Yes. And relieved, too, a little.



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And, at the same time, still a bit frightened."

"It's probably for the best."

"Yes. It's sad, though. Have you told this to anyone else?"

"No. After all, it's still only a theory. I've got to find some kind of proof. Except that I don't know how."

"You've convinced me." She stood in the doorway, then turned to him and he could see that she was crying. She dashed the tears from her eyes. "I suppose we have to go on doing the same things. We have to have dinner tonight. I must shop . . ."

He took her in his arms. "It'll be all right," he said.

"I feel so helpless! What are you going to *do?*"

"Right now," he said, "I think I'll go fishing."

Ann began to laugh, a little hysterically. "You *are* relaxed about it," she said.

"Might as well relax and give it more thought."

Ann kissed him and went into the kitchen. She was gone when he came out with his rod and creel. Going down the walk under the trees, he was aware again of what a fine autumn afternoon it was. He began to whistle as he went down the hill toward the stream.

He didn't catch anything, of course. He had fished the pool at least a hundred times without luck, but that did not matter. He knew there was a fighting old bass in its depths and, probably, he would have been sorry to catch him. Now, his line gently agitated the dark water as he sat under a big tree on the stream bank and smoked. Idly he opened the copy of Yeats' poems and began reading: *Turning and turning in the widening gyre . . .*

In mounting excitement, he read the coldly beautiful, the terrible and revelatory poem through to the end. *And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?*

Ward became aware that his pipe was out. He put it away, feeling the goose pimples, generated by the poem, leave his flesh. Then he shook himself and sighed. We're lucky, he thought, it might have been the way the old boy predicted it in the poem. It might have been terrible.

He sighed again, watching his line in the dark water, and thought of Bobby. You could hardly call Bobby a rough beast. The line flickered in the water and then was still. He would have a lot of time for this kind of life, he thought, if his theory were correct. He watched a flight of leaves dapple the pool with the insignia of autumn. He was not sure he wanted to spend a lifetime fishing.



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SUDDENLY the pool exploded into motion, the water frothed and flashed white and the line in his hand sang like a piano wire. Automatically, he jerked his line and began to reel in, at the same time his mind was telling him no line of its weight could long hold what he had hooked. As suddenly as the action had begun, it was ended and he was pulling something heavy against the stream bank. He gaped at it, his eyes popping. Then he heard the rustle of leaves and the snap of a stick behind him.

"Catch somep'n, teach'?" a voice asked.

"Yes, I caught something." He got his tobacco pouch from his pocket and filled his pipe, trying to keep his hands from trembling.

"Gee, he's a *big* one, teach'," the voice said.

Ward stood up. The boy, Jacky Hodge, leaning over the bank looking down at the fish. Behind him, Ward saw Bobby, Alec Cress, Danny and several others. *Now which of you is laughing?* he wondered. But there was no way to tell. Jacky, a boy of twelve or thirteen, had his usual look of stupid good nature. Bobby, under the flambeau of red hair, dreamed at the fish. The others wore the open poker faces of children.

"That's a *funny* fish," one of them said and then they were all laughing as they raced away.

With some difficulty, Ward got the fish out of the water and began to drag it up the hill toward his house.

"Outspace fish," Ward said as he dumped the thing on the work table where Ann had deposited the bag of groceries.

"Where did you get *that?*"

"I just caught it. Down in the stream."

"*That?* In our stream?"

"Yeah."

He looked at it. The fish resembled a small marlin in shape, but it looked as if its sides had been painted by an abstract artist.

"They planted it on my hook," he told her. "Teleported it from somewhere and planted it on me. Like the tigers."

"Who?"

"I don't know—one of the kids. There were a bunch of them down by the river."

"Is it the proof you wanted?"

"Almost. I'd like to make them —whoever they are — admit it, though. But you can't pry anything out of them. They stick together like—like kids, I guess. Tell me, why is it that the smart ones don't discriminate? They'd as soon play with morons like Hodge or Cress as with the brainy ones."

"Democratic, I guess," Ann said. She looked at the fish with-



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out enthusiasm and turned it over on its other side. "Weren't you the same way, when you were a boy?"

"Guess so. Leader of my group was almost an idiot. Head of the 3Rs now." He started to put his fishing tackle away. "Got to get ready for Star Watch," he said. "I'm on the early trick tonight." He halted in the kitchen doorway, still holding the rod and creel. He looked back at the fish. "That kind of thing is likely to take all the fun out of fishing," he told her.

USUALLY, he found Star Watch a bore. There were often Saucer sightings, it was true. He had had many himself, some of them very close in, but all that had become routine. At first, the government had tried shooting them down, but the attempts had ended in total failure and the Saucers still came, aloof and unreasonable, as if they did not even know that they were being shot at. Later, communication had been tried—but with no better results.

Now, when the Saucers were sighted, the Watcher phoned in a report, some bored plotter in Saucer Control took bearings and speed, or replied that they had the thing on radar. The next day, the score of sightings would be Spellcast — it was less exciting than watching for grunnion.

Tonight, however, Ward was excited. As he left his house, he set out at a fast pace for the school. He found Bobby in front of the boys' dormitory.

"What is it, John?" the boy called as he trotted over to the teacher.

"How'd you like to come on Star Watch with me?"

"All right." They went down the street together.

"I want to try something," Ward told the boy. "I think I know how we can get in touch with the Saucer people."

"But they *have* tried."

"Yes, I know—with radio and blinker lights and all that. But maybe that's the wrong way. Bobby, you're a telepath, aren't you?"

"I'm not very good at it and anyway I don't think it'll work."

"Why not?"

"I tried once, but I couldn't seem to get anywhere. They seemed — I dunno — funny."

"In what way?" Ward asked the boy.

"Just sort of funny."

"Well, if we're lucky, maybe we can try again tonight."

"Yeah," Bobby said, "it's probably a good night for it. Full moon. Why do you suppose they seem to like the full moon, John?"

"I wish I knew."

It didn't look as if they were



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going to have any luck. They had waited for two hours and Bobby was asleep on a bench in the small "duck blind" the Watchers used. Then John heard it.

It was a high shimmer of sound and it gave him gooseflesh, as it always did. He couldn't see anything yet. Then it appeared to the north, very low, like a coagulation of the moonlight itself, and he shook the boy.

Bobby was awake immediately and, together, they watched its approach. It was moving slowly, turned on an edge. It looked like a knife of light. Then it rolled over, or shifted its form, and the familiar shape appeared. The humming stopped and the Saucer floated in the moonlight like a giant metallic lily-pad, perhaps a half mile away.

"Try now, Bobby," he said, attempting to keep calm.

The boy stood in the moonlight in front of the blind, very still, as if collecting the silence out of the night. Once he shook his head as though to clear it and started to say something. Then, for a long minute, he held his face toward the moon as if he were listening.

Suddenly, he giggled.

"What is it?" Ward snapped, unable to repress his impatience.

"I'm not sure. I thought it seemed something like a joke."

"Try to ask where they're from."

A moment later, the boy shook his head. "I guess I can't get anything," he said. "All I seem to get is that they're saying, '*We're here.*' As if they didn't understand me."

"All right. Try to get *anything*."

A moment later, the ship turned on edge, or shifted its shape, and slid back into the sky. Ward picked up the phone and called Saucer Control.

"Got it," the bored voice said.

He put down the phone and sat in silence, feeling sick with frustration.

"Might as well knock off, Bobby," he said gently to the boy. "I guess that's all for the night. You run along and hit the sack."

The boy started to leave and then turned back. "I'm sorry, John," he said. "I guess I'm not very good at it. There's one thing though . . ." He hesitated.

"Yes?"

"I don't think they know any poetry. In fact, I'm pretty sure of that."

"All right," Ward said, laughing. "I guess that's the most important thing in *your* life right now. Run along, Bobby."

AN hour later, his watch ended and he started for home, still feeling depressed at having



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failed. He was passing the dormitory when he saw it. It hung in the air, almost overhead. The color of the moonlight itself, it was hard to spot. But it was not the Saucer that held him rigid with attention.

Over the roof of the dormitory, small and growing smaller as it went straight toward the Saucer, he saw a figure, then another and then a third. While he watched, there was a jet of blue light from the object in the sky—the opening of an airlock, he thought—and the figures disappeared; one by one, into the interior of the ship. Ward began to run.

It was strictly forbidden for a teacher to enter the dormitory—that part of the boys' world was completely their own. But he ignored that ruling now as he raced up the stairs. All he could think of was that this was the chance to identify the invaders. The boys who had levitated themselves up to the Saucer would be missing.

He was still exultantly certain of this as he jerked open the doors of the first three rooms. Each one was empty. And the fourth and fifth, as well. Frantically, he pulled open door after door, going through the motions, although his mind told him that it was useless, that all of the boys, with a Saucer so close, would be out looking at it.

Wait until they returned? He couldn't remain in the dormitory and, even if he did, when they all came back, how could he find out which boys had gone up to the ship? They wouldn't be likely to tell, nor would the others, even if they knew. Aimlessly, he went on opening doors, flashing his Watcher's light.

PERHAPS there would be a clue in one of the rooms. Excited again, he rapidly checked them, rummaging in closets, picking up their sports things and their toys. Nothing there. Until he found the book.

It was an odd-looking book, in a language he couldn't read. He looked at it doubtfully. Was the script simply Cyrillic? Or Hebrew? He stuffed it into his pocket and glanced around at the walls of the room. Pictures of athletes, mostly, and a couple of pin-ups. In a drawer, under some clothing, a French post card. He examined some of the objects on the dresser.

Then he was looking stupidly at his hand. He was holding a piece of string with a ring attached to it. And, just as certainly, there was something attached to the other end. Or it had been. But there was nothing he could see now. He pulled on the string and it tightened. Yes, there was a drag on the other end, *but*



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*there was nothing he could see . . . or feel.*

He tried to reconstruct his actions. He had been pawing among the things. He had taken hold of the string and had pulled something attached to the end of it off the table. The thing had fallen and disappeared—but *where?* It was *still* tied to the string, but where was it?

Another dimension, he thought, feeling the hair stand up on his neck, the sudden riot of his blood as he knew he had found the evidence he wanted.

He snapped off the light and groped his way rapidly down the stairs. Once on the street, he began to run. It did not occur to him to feel ridiculous at dragging along behind him, on the end of a string, some object which he could not see.

"OKAY," Ann said. "But what *is* it?" She sat on the divan looking at the book.

"I don't know, but I think it's alien."

"*I* think it's a comic book. In some foreign language—or maybe in classical Greek for all we know." She pointed to an illustration. "Isn't this like the fish you caught? Of course it is. And look at the fisherman—his clothes are funny looking, but I'll bet he's telling about the one that got away."

"Damn it, don't joke! What about *this?*" He waved the string.

"Well, what about it?"

"It's extra-dimensional. It's . . ." He jerked the string with nervous repetition and, suddenly, something was in his hand. Surprised, he dropped it. It disappeared and he felt the tug on the end of the string.

"There *is* something!" He began jerking the string and it was there again. This time he held it, looking at it with awe.

It was neither very big nor very heavy. It was probably made out of some kind of glass or plastic. The color was dazzling, but that was not what made him turn his head away—it was the shape of the thing. Something was wrong with its surfaces. Plane melted into plane, the surface curved and rejoined itself. He felt dizzy.

"What is it, John?"

"Something — something like a Klein Bottle— or a tesseract — or maybe both of them together." He looked at it for a moment and then turned away again. It was impossible to look at it very long. "It's something built to cut through our three-dimensional space," he said. He dropped it, then tugged. The thing dropped out of sight and reappeared again, rolling up the string toward his hand.

That was when he lost con-



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trol. He lay down on the floor and howled in a seizure of laughter that was like crying.

"*John!*" Ann said primly. "John Ward, you *stop!*" She went out of the room and returned with a glass half full of whisky.

Ward got up from the floor and weakly slouched in a chair. He took a long drink from the glass, lit his pipe with great deliberation, and spoke very softly. "Well," he said, "I think we've got the answer."

"Have we?"

"Sure. It was there all the time and I couldn't see it. I always thought it was strange we couldn't get in touch with the Outspacers. I had Bobby try tonight —*he* couldn't do anything either. I thought maybe he wasn't trying —or that he was one of them and didn't want to let me in on it. He said they sounded—funny. By that, he meant strange or alien, I thought."

"Well, I'm sure they must be," Ann said, relaxed now that John's outburst was over.

"Yes. But that's *not* what he meant — he's just a normal human genius. He *meant* funny." He lifted his hand. "Know what this is?" He held up the strange object on the string. "It's a *yo-yo*. An *extra-dimensional yo-yo*. And you were right — that thing *is* a comic book. Look," he said. He held the odd object toward her. "See this? J.H. — Jacky Hodge, one of the stupidest ones. It's *his* yo-yo. But I was right about one thing. We *are* being invaded. It's probably been going on for centuries. Invaded by *morons,* morons with interstellar drives, super-science — super-*yo-yos!* Morons from the stars!"

He began to laugh again. Ann went out to the kitchen for another glass. Then, after a while, she went back for the bottle.

—JEFFERSON HIGHE

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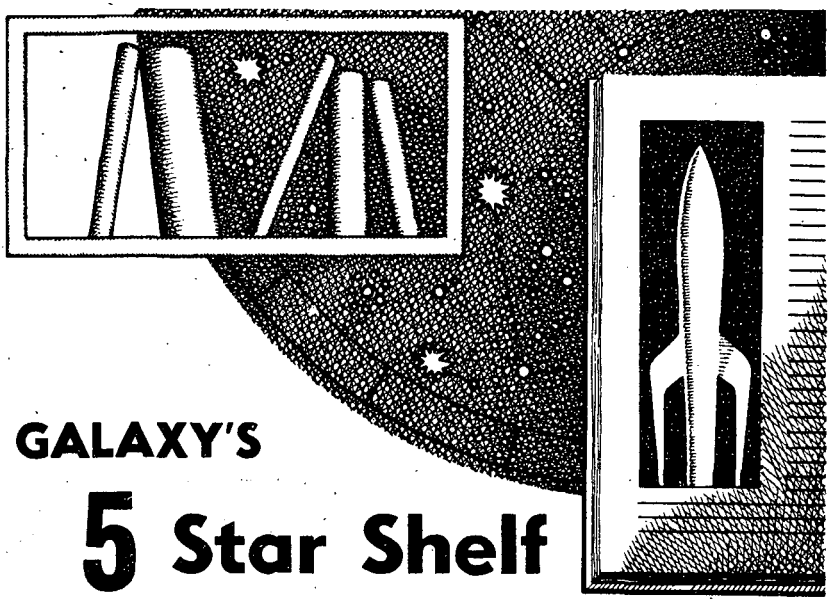

# GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

*PRELUDE TO SPACE by Arthur C. Clarke. Gnome Press,* $2.50; *Ballantine Books,* 35c

I'm glad to be able to review this book, which first appeared as GALAXY *Science Fiction Novel No.* 3, back in 1950. I could only mention it then, since there was (and still is) a house rule against reviewing GALAXY Novels: but here at last is my chance.

For my money, *Prelude To Space* is the most real, most gripping and most unforgettable story of the making and launching of the first manned Moon rocket ever written — and a good many have been.

It is a description of a British Commonwealth undertaking, with planning in England and construction in Australia. But actually the project is for all humanity, since scientists of many nationalities work on it (Dirk Alexson, project historian and one of the chief protagonists, is an American), and since the end product of the flight — knowledge — will be available to all.

There is little melodrama in the book, almost nothing but hard work, cooperation, endless planning and building. And at the



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end, the reader is left with an inescapable feeling that *this* is the way it will be, *this* is a genuine glimpse of future reality. It's a magnificent book, and Gnome and Ballantine are to be congratulated on reprinting it.

*THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, THIRD SERIES, edited by Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas. Doubleday & Co.,* $3.25

YOU can always expect delightful reading in the Boucher-McComas annuals, and this one is no exception. Sixteen items, ranging from superb science fiction like William Lindsay Gresham's "The Star Gypsies" to lovely fantasy like Manly Wade Wellman's "Vandy, Vandy," make up the book. Of the 16, there were only three that I couldn't go for.

There's also a much-to-the-point short introduction, about how science fiction and fantasy are primarily *fun*, which nobody should deny, but some stark-minded pseudo-philosophers often do.

Highly recommended.

*THE SINISTER RESEARCHES OF C. P. RANSOM by H. Nearing, Jr. Doubleday & Co.,* $2.95

ADMIRERS of the "little round belly" that goes with Professor Cleanth Penn Ransom will (like the present reviewer) enjoy the Professor's misadventures (with the ubiquitous MacTate of the Philosophy Department as constant male Cassandra and companion) all over again in their ingeniously redesigned form in the present volume.

To give the book the shape of a novel, Dr. Nearing (Ph.D. on 17th century historical poetry) has added a new beginning and ending, and new connective tissue to tie together into a highly entertaining unit two new tales and seven that were first published in *Fantasy and Science Fiction.*

Perhaps this high-level funning will seem a bit rarefied to fanatics of "pure" science fiction, but to the rest of us, Professor Ransom's surrealist undertakings will have an immediate and enduring appeal.

The book should go on the shelf right next to *Gavagan's Bar* and similar enchantments.

*THE CAVES OF STEEL by Isaac Asimov. Doubleday & Co.,* $2.95

AS confirmed GALAXY readers know, Asimov has done it again — turned out a swift-paced,



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ingenious and meaningful exploration of our distant tomorrows. Even those who read it first as a serial in this magazine will want to read it again in its hard-bound form, for it delivers almost as much excitement on a second reading as it did on the first.

The story is particularly fascinating to Asimov experts, because of the way it combines his interest in robotics with his consuming preoccupation with the sociology of a technology-mad, bureaucratically tethered world of tomorrow.

It's a first rate detective story, too—a suspense novel that will leave you breathless.

*SCIENCE FICTION CARNIVAL, edited by Fredric Brown and Mack Reynolds. Shasta Pubs.*, $3.50

IT'S often occurred to me that it might be a good idea to put together an anthology of funny science fiction, but I've been kept from it by the uncomfortable suspicion that one man's belly laugh only too often is another man's yawn. Unfortunately, the present collection confirms that suspicion.

There are 13 tales in this book, of which I like 5—those by Leinster, Tenn, Fred Brown himself, Eric Frank Russell, and a little satire by a Clive Jackson. The rest range from pretty fair (Mack Reynold's entry) to not for me (all the rest).

Of course, you may find the whole collection hilarious; so don't go on my say-so. Better try the book yourself.

*WILD TALENT by Wilson Tucker. Rinehart & Co.*, $2.50

THE best science suspense story Tucker has done yet takes you by the scruff of the neck and pell-mells you through a series of adventures that are all the more exciting because they are, on the surface, well-nigh motionless. For this is adventure of the mind—the story (done before, of course, but never better) of the first telepath and his struggles with a non-telepathic society.

In this thriller, Paul Breen, an American, is brusquely though comfortably imprisoned, once his powers are known, by a Federal intelligence agency that builds up a worldwide espionage network around him as a human communications center. He can read the mind of everyone he has ever met (though not others), and over any distance. Thus, agents who are known to Breen need only to think their discoveries wherever they are and he will get the data.

It's a crisply written, thorough-



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ly realized tale of the potentialities of "psi" powers. Though not particularly subtle or profound, it's guaranteed to keep you chained to the edge of your chair for a fascinated couple of hours.

*SENTINELS OF SPACE by Eric Frank Russell; THE ULTIMATE INVADER, AND OTHER SCIENCE FICTION, edited by Donald A. Wollheim. Ace Books,* 35c

THE third "Ace Double Novel" is itself novel, inasmuch as half of the fat little book (320 pages) is a collection of four never-before-anthologized short stories and novelets, all of them good.

The full-length novel, *Sentinels of Space,* is a reprint, of course, and also good. The four shorter items include one by Russell, and one each by Murray Leinster, Malcolm Jameson, and Frank Belknap Long—a book bargain even if you already have the Russell novel.

*STOWAWAY TO MARS by John Beynon. Nova Publications, London, England. Available from American science fiction book services at* 35c *plus postage*

ASIDE from a couple of inherently improbable situations, this is an interesting adventure story of the first space voyage to Mars. Most improbable is the *private* construction of a spaceship by hero Dale Curtance and a staff of assistants, and next most improbable is the old chestnut about stowing away on a spaceship — particularly when, in this case, the stowaway is a girl, heroine Joan Shirring.

Outside of these dubious items, and a faintly distasteful emphasis on British nationalism (something you don't find in Clarke's *Prelude to Space,* reviewed above), the story is effective.

*SPACE TUG by Murray Leinster. Shasta Publishers,* $2.50

IN this sequel to *Space Platform,* Murray Leinster has written a juvenile that has all the melodrama of the oldest-fashioned space opera, plus a lot of interesting technology rarely found in pure adventure stories.

After many escapades, young Joe Kenmore and his buddies make the first landing on the Moon, which they do by helping the first ship maneuver down to the Moon's surface with their own little "space tug," just as a nautical tugboat helps ocean liners into their piers. Lots of Iron Curtain sabotage is defeated, as is a psychotic American scientist who sees only futility in everything.



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Plenty of excitement, indeed, though not much maturity.

*THE LOST WORLD by A. Conan Doyle. Permabooks,* 25c

IT is good to have this wonderful old chestnut back in print again, particularly since the price is low enough so that anyone can afford to buy and read what probably is Professor Challenger's greatest adventure. It seems lushly overwritten, of course, but to this wrinkled and balding reviewer, at least, that doesn't make any difference.

It's an enormously effective tale about the exploration of a bit of prehistory imagined still to exist on top of an inaccessible plateau far up the Amazon.

*SPACE PIONEERS, edited by Andre Norton. World Publishing Co.,* $2.75

MISS Norton's second anthology is, like the first, aimed at the juvenile market, but there is nothing particularly juvenile about it. Of the nine stories it contains, four are first-rate, three acceptable, and only two below passing.

Included are tales by Eric Russell, H. B. Fyfe, Ray Gallun (two!), James Schmitz, Fritz Leiber, Ray Jones, Jerome Bixby, and K. Houston Brunner.

The only thing wrong with the book is its slimness. You cannot present even a smattering of science fiction's wealth of imaginings about space in nine stories, one of which (Russell's) isn't a space opera at all, but an alien invasion tale.

*THE STOLEN SPHERE by John Kier Cross. E. P. Dutton & Co.,* $2.75

LIKE so many other contemporary science fictions, this British item has to do with the plots and counterplots surrounding an attempt to launch an Earth satellite space station. It also deals at interminable length with the doings of a family of English trapeze artists, and with a bunch of incredible villains led by a magician and illusionist known as Rubberface.

The whole thing is done in a nervous-chatty-quaint style that is something like a cross between William J. Locke, Mother Goose, Laurence Sterne and E. Phillips Oppenheim.

It's supposed to be for youngsters. If so, it's only for youngsters who don't mind being whimsy-whamsied on one page and scared witless on the next. There's practically nothing at all about the space station—it's just a bit of plot mechanism.

—GROFF CONKLIN



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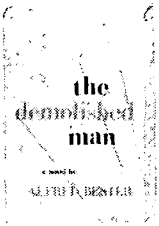


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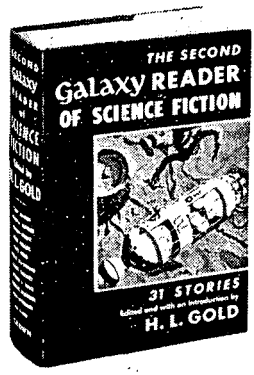


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# FELONY

By JAMES CAUSEY

*Vogel started with crossword puzzles . . . and worked his way up to Man's greatest enigma!*

WHEN he was nine, Vogel almost killed another boy who inadvertently scattered his half-completed jigsaw puzzle.

At sixteen, he discovered the mysteries of the Danish Gambit, and cried.

At twenty-two, he crouched in a foxhole on Okinawa, oblivious to the death bursting about him, squinting in a painful ecstasy at the tattered fragment of newspaper on his knee. His sergeant screamed in agony, then died at his elbow. Vogel's face lit up. "Slay," he said happily, scribbling. As crossword puzzles go, it had been a toughie.

At thirty, he was Production Manager of Sachs Fixtures. His men hated him. The General Manager loved him. Tall, gaunt and ruthless, he could glance at any detail print and instantly pinpoint the pattern of final assembly, total man-hour budget and fabrication lead time.

Once, he made a mistake.

On a forty-thousand-dollar job lot he estimated too high on production scrap. When the final assemblies were completed, they had two feet of bulb extension

Illustrated by VIDMER



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left over. It disturbed him. He spent that evening in his den brooding over chessmen. His wife let him alone.

Next day, he hired Amenth.

PERSONNEL called that morning and apologized. "No experience, but amazing shop aptitude. He's coming down to you for an interview."

"I want," Vogel said into the phone, "three bench men. By noon. *With* shop experience."

Personnel was sorry. Vogel snarled and hung up.

"Hello, please, sir," said a voice.

Vogel stared, icily.

Meekness cowered in front of his desk. Meekness in the form of a small birdlike person with beseeching amber eyes.

"I am Amenth," he said, cringing.

Vogel eyed the olive skin, the cheekbones, the blue-black hair. "A wetback," he said. "Three men short and they send me wetbacks. You know sheet metal, buster?"

"I am not of the understanding," Amenth offered. "Experience, no." He beamed. "Aptitude, yes."

Fighting apoplexy, Vogel took him out into the shop. Amenth cringed at the howl of air tools and punch presses. Vogel contemptuously took him by the arm and led him to a workbench where a wizened persimmon of a man performed deft lightnings with rivets and air wrench.

"Benny, this is Amenth. He's new." Vogel pronounced it like a curse. "Get him some goggles from the crib, a rivet gun."

Vogel returned to his office scowling. The phone rang almost instantly.

"Boss," said Benny, "he's from nothing—all thumbs with an air wrench and he don't know alclad from stainless."

"Be right out," Vogel said, hanging up.

Before he had a chance to fire Amenth, the Fabrication Super came in with a production problem. Vogel solved it, but it was almost an hour before he returned to Benny's bench—and stared.

Amenth was a blur of motion. His Keller chattered like a live thing.

A furious sweating Benny snapped at Vogel, "You playing practical jokes? Look, this guy's gone crazy, he's fifty per cent under standard! Tell him to slow down before I file a grievance."

Amenth beamed. "I am of the aptitude," he said.

A queer deep tingle went through Vogel. The crystal delight of challenge he felt when confronted by an apparently impregnable fianchetto.

That was the first day.



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A WEEK later, Vogel was compiling a progress report from completed shop travelers. Abruptly he scowled at one traveler, then said, "Charlie!"

"Yes, sir," one of the planners said.

"Why didn't these galley panels go out for drop hammer?"

Charlie peered at the form and whistled. "Somebody must have changed the planning sheet."

"Get me the story!"

Charlie went hurriedly out into the shop.

Some time later he returned with a pale dazed look. "It's this guy in assembly," he said. "Name is Amenth. He didn't even read the traveler. Just looked at the attached detail print and decided to miter the edges, then reverse the flange with a weld." He threw the completed part on Vogel's desk. "Go ahead, check those tolerances," he said whitely. "Right on the money."

Vogel walked over to a calculator and figured. There was a dreamy expression in his eyes. He said softly, "All fabrication in our own shop. A net saving of 93 cents per unit, or eight hundred dollars total. I believe you planned this item, Charlie."

Vogel fired him.

That same afternoon Amenth came into the office on Vogel's order. "Sir?"

"Don't you know how to read a traveler?" Vogel asked sternly.

"It was a lucky accident." Amenth looked terrified. "I just read the print—"

"And did what seemed logical." Statement, then a very quiet question. "What happened to your accent?"

The little man looked blank.

Vogel took a slow deep breath. "I've got a material planning job open," he said tightly. "Three-fifty to start. Interested?"

For a moment he thought Amenth would lick his hand.

The little man took to planning sheets like a duck to water. He pored feverishly over blueprints, turning out travelers in a steady flood.

Vogel watched him. He went over to Personnel, requested Amenth's employment application, read it and scowled. It was a masterpiece of anonymity. Birthplace: New York. Former Occupation: Laborer. Hobbies: None. He memorized Amenth's address and returned the application.

Vogel always ate lunch in the office with his expediters. That noon two of them got into an argument about the planets.

"I say there is life on Mars," Pete Stone insisted stubbornly. "When the polar ice cap melts, the water runs along the canals and traces of green from growing vegetation can be spotted."



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"Which proves nothing," Harvey Lamb yawned. Lamb was chief expediter. "Man couldn't live there, anyway. There's not enough oxygen."

"You would be amazed," Amenth said quietly, "at the adaptability of Man."

Vogel set down his thermos and leaned forward. "You mean Martians, for instance, could live here, assuming they existed and had spaceships?"

Amenth's smile was infinitely bitter. "Until they'd go mad."

The talk turned to baseball. Vogel lit his pipe and gave Amenth a surreptitious glance. The little man slumped in the corner, bleak and withdrawn.

This was delicious.

VOGEL left the shop and drove across town to Amenth's address. It turned out to be an ancient rooming house on the West Side. Mrs. Reardon, the landlady, was an apathetic woman who brightened when he asked her about Amenth.

"He moved in just three weeks ago." Her face softened in recollection. "He was like a lost dog coming in out of the rain. Couldn't hardly speak English and he wanted me to trust him for the rent. I must have been crazy." Her nostrils flared. "Not that he hasn't paid up. Are you a cop?"

Vogel nodded as he took out his wallet. In it was his honorary sheriff's badge, but he doubted if the woman would know the difference. She didn't. She led the way upstairs to Amenth's room, worrying, and Vogel assured her they were only looking for a hit-and-run witness, that it was strictly routine.

Amenth's room was incredibly asceptic, barren of pictures, ash trays, dirty laundry, any of the normal masculine debris. Vogel got the stark impression of a convict's cell. In the bleak dresser were two pair of socks, underwear, one tie. In the closet hung one white shirt . . . period. Everything wore an indefinable patina of newness. Two books graced the top of the dresser. Vogel recognized one of them, a text on fabrication and design which Amenth had borrowed from his office. The other was a child's primer of English.

"He stays in his room almost every night—reads mostly, and he speaks English much better now," said Mrs. Reardon. "A good tenant—I can't complain—and he's quiet and clean." She described Amenth and Vogel shook his head.

"Our man is about sixty, with a beard," he said. "Funny coincidence. It's a strange name."

Mrs. Reardon agreed.

Vogel drove back to the shop, whistling.



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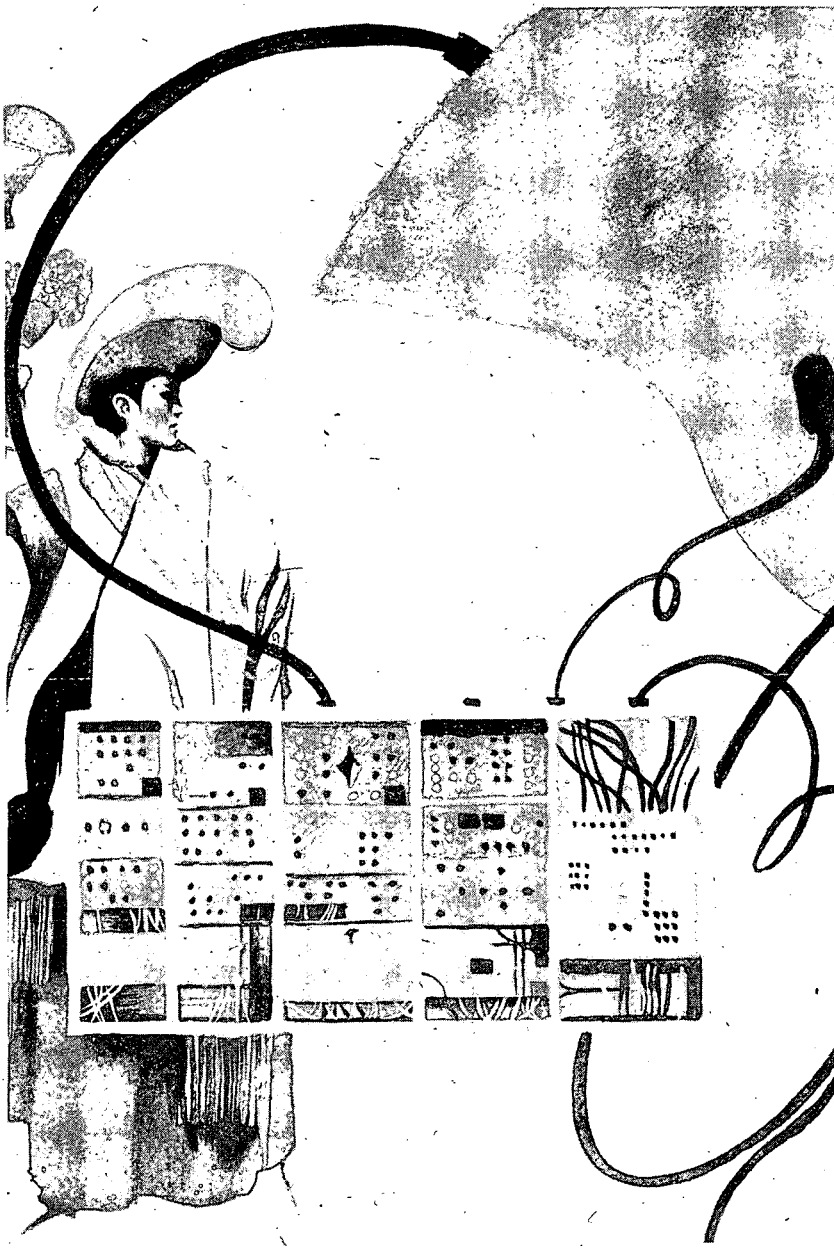

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He did not go to his chess club that night, but went to the library instead. He read about Flying Saucers, about space travel, about the possibility of life on other planets. Sometimes he chuckled. Once he frowned deeply and bit his lip.

That night in bed, listening to his wife's shallow breathing, he said, "Alice."

"Yes?"

"Supposing you were lost on a desert island. What would you do?"

"I'd build a raft," she said sleepily.

Vogel smiled into the darkness.

Next day he made a systematic tour of the stockroom, scanning the racks of completed sub-assemblies, the gleaming fixture components, the rows of panels, brackets, extrusions, all waiting like soldiers to march from the stockroom into final assembly.

Vogel suddenly grunted.

There, half hidden behind a row of stainless-steel basin assemblies, was a nine-inch bowl. He examined it. The bowl was heavy and shiny. There was no part number stamp, and the metal was not alclad, not stainless, not cad nor zinc. Five small copper discs had been welded to the lower flange.

Vogel carefully scraped off a sample with a file. Then he replaced the part in the stock rack and went into his office where he placed the sample in an envelope.

That afternoon he ranged the shop like a hound.

In the shipping crib, he found a half-completed detail that struck a chord of strangeness. Two twisted copper vanes with a crumpled shop traveler signed by Amenth. The next operation specified furnace braze. Vogel squinted at the attached detail print. It was a current job number.

He spent the next two hours in the ozalid room, leafing through the print files. The job number called for a deep-freeze showcase, and there were exactly two hundred and seven detail drawings involved.

Not one of them matched the print in shipping.

After an almost silent dinner at home, he sat smoking his pipe, waiting for the phone to ring. It rang at eight.

"It's platinum," Carstairs said. Tim Carstairs was a night-shift chemist. "Anything wrong, Mr. Vogel?"

"No." Vogel paused. "Thanks, Tim." He hung up, glanced at his fingers. They were shaking.

"You," Alice said, "look ready to call mate in three."

"I'm going over to the shop," he said, kissing her. "Don't wait up."



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HE was not surprised to see the light on in the parts control section. Amenth was writing planning sheets.

"I don't believe we authorized overtime," Vogel told him mildly, hanging up his coat.

"Just loose ends." Amenth's smile was nervous. "Tying up these burden charts. I'm on my own time."

"Thought I'd set up next month's budget." Vogel sat at his desk. "By the way, what did you do before you came here?"

"Odd jobs." Amenth's lips twitched.

"Your family live on the coast?"

Sweat glistened on the little man's forehead. "Ah—no. My folks passed on years ago."

Cat and mouse.

"You've done good work lately." Vogel yawned, studying the progress chart on the wall. Behind him he heard a soft exhalation of relief, the furtive rustle of papers as Amenth cleaned off his desk.

When Amenth finally left, Vogel went over to his desk and methodically ransacked the work in process file. It took him two hours to find what he was looking for.

One: A schematic detail on graph paper which resembled no type of circuit Vogel had ever seen.

Two: Fourteen completed shop travelers on which were typed clearly, *Call Amenth upon completion.* That was not unusual; most expediters wanted to be notified when a hot part hit Inspection. The unusual part was that *no inspection stamp* had been placed opposite the final operation of *Inspect, Identify, Return to Stock.* Ergo, Amenth had inspected and stocked the parts himself.

Three: A progress chart with dates, indicating four detail parts still remaining in fabrication. Final assembly date—tomorrow!

The following afternoon, Vogel sat alone in the conference room. The door opened and Amenth came in. "You sent for me, sir?"

"Sit down, Amenth. Let's talk a while."

Amenth sat down uneasily.

"We're considering you for promotion," Vogel said, silencing the little man's protests with a deprecating wave. "But we've got to know if you're ready. Let's talk about your job."

Amenth relaxed.

They talked shop for a few moments, then Vogel opened a folder, took out his watch. "Very good," he said. "Now let's check your initiative potential." As Amenth stiffened, Vogel reassured him, "Relax. It's a routine association test."



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For the next ten minutes he timed Amenth's responses with a stop watch. Most of the words were familiar shop words and most of the responses were standard.

"*Job.*"

"Escape," Amenth said instantly.

"*Blueprint.*"

"Create."

"*Noise.*"

"Hate."

"*Want.*"

"Home!"

It was all so childish, so obvious, and Amenth's eyes were frightened amber pools when Vogel dismissed him. No matter. Let him suspect. Vogel studied the reaction results with grim amusement.

Outside, the shop roared.

And Amenth's travelers sped the rounds: Issue material; Shear to size; Form on brake; Weld per print; Miter, drill, inspect, stock. One by one, the strange details were being formed, finished, to lie inert in the stockroom, to await final assembly.

Assembly.

Of *what?*

Tonight was project completion.

MIDNIGHT.

Vogel stood in darkness, leaning against the wall. He was tired. He had maintained this vigil for three hours. His right leg was numb and he started to shift position, then froze as he heard footsteps. Three aisles over, a light exploded, blindingly. He held his breath.

From outside in fabrication came the muffled clang of drill press and power brake, the sounds of the night shift. He waited. Three aisles over, something moved. Someone fumbled in the stock bins, collecting shaped pieces of metal, grunting with the effort of piling them on the salvage bench, now panting with impatience while assembling the parts. There was a hammering, a fitting together, a flash of light, a humming of power and finally a sob of relief.

Vogel's hand slipped into his coat pocket and grasped the gun. He moved silently.

Amenth stood at the salvage bench, adjusting studs and connecting terminals. Vogel stared at the final assembly.

It was a helmet. A large silvery helmet, connected to a nightmarish maze of wiring, mounted on a rectangular plastic base. It hummed, although there was no visible source of power. Amenth put on the helmet with a feverish haste. Vogel chuckled. Amenth stood motionless. Then as his hand darted toward a stand, Vogel said sharply, "Don't!"

Amenth stared at the gun.



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"Take it off!" Vogel's voice was iron.

Amenth slowly took off the helmet. His eyes were golden with tears. "Please," he said.

"Mars or Venus?" Vogel said. "Which?"

"N-neither. You could not grasp the concept. Let me go. Please!"

"Where?" Vogel prodded. "Another dimension?"

"You would call it that," the alien whispered. Hope brightened his face. "You want something? Wealth? Power?"

It was the way he said the words, like a white trader offering his aborigine captors glass beads to set him free.

Vogel nodded toward the circuit. "That hookup—you tap the gravitational field direct? Cosmic rays?"

"Your planet's magnet force lines. Look, I'll leave you the schematic diagram. It's simple, really. You can use it to transmute—" He babbled on with a heartbreaking eagerness, and Vogel listened.

"In my own world," said Amenth brokenly, "I am a moron. A criminal moron. Once, out of a childish malice, I destroyed beauty. One of the singing crystals." He shuddered. "I was punished. They sent me here—to the snake pit. Sentence for felony. This—" he indicated the helmet—"would have fused three seconds after I used it. So, incidentally, would this entire shop. I had no time to construct a feedback dispersion."

"Tell me about your world," Vogel said.

Amenth told him.

Vogel's breath hissed softly between his teeth. All his life an unformed vision had tormented him, driven him toward perfection. Abruptly the vision was reality. He smiled, moved forward. "You shouldn't have told me."

Amenth saw the intent in his eyes and started to beg. Vogel clipped him behind the ear.


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He put the helmet on, gingerly. The electrodes tingled against his temple and his grin was wry as he thought of Alice. Then he depressed the stud.

Vogel sobbed.

COLOR blinded him, rainbows blared in sweet, sparkling thunder. He whimpered, covering his eyes. The music drowned him in a fugue of weeping delight. Slowly he raised his head.

He stood ankle-deep in gold crystals that stretched out forever in a splendid sea of flame. The crystals sang softly, achingly, to a silver sun in an emerald sky. A grove of blue needle trees tinkled in ecstasy on his left. And beyond those trees . . .

The city sang.

White spires foamed skyward in impossible cataracts of glory. A glissando of joy burned his eardrums, and he could not face that living splendor. It was the city beyond dreams, beyond legend, the city where all dreams end. He strode toward it, raptly.

The crystals screamed. The blue needle forest lashed wildly, and terror shivered through the air in shrieking dissonance.

From the blue forest, people ran. Beautiful people, with great golden eyes and scarlet tunics. They could have been Amenth's brothers and sisters. They stared, horror and revulsion twisting their faces. They started toward him.

Vogel understood.

If destroying beauty on this world was a crime, then killing ugliness must be a duty.

On this world, he was ugly—

—JAMES CAUSEY

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# Gladiator at Law

By FREDERIK POHL and C. M. KORNBLUTH

*Part 2 of a 3-Part Serial*

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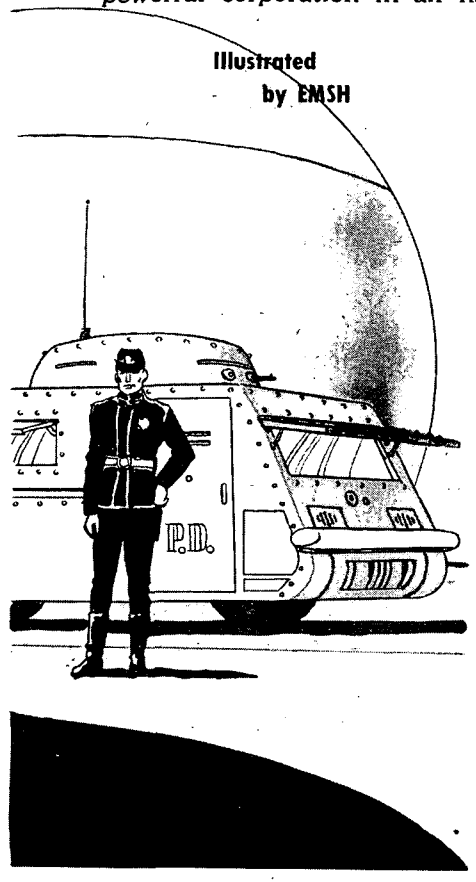
***At last, Mundin had a legal case . . . two crackpots who wanted to grab off the biggest corporation on Earth! And he had to revise the old adage to: "If you can't join 'em, lick 'em!"***

## *SYNOPSIS*

***G-M-L Homes,*** *as the result of a great architectural advance, has become the biggest and most powerful corporation in all history. Its bubble houses, rather than being on the open market, go with contract status for those with jobs.*




***Belly Rave*** *or its local equivalent—and every city has one—is where those without contract status live, if existence in the wretched squalor of those brawling thieves' dens can be called living. Neglected slums that once were suburban developments ("Picture Window, Expansion Attic for your Growing Family"), Belly Rave, the future corruption of Belle Reve Estates, and its like are the neglected results of G-M-L's breakthrough in architecture.*

***Charles Mundin,*** *a criminal lawyer, starving because he was not fortunate enough to be born into one of the corporate-law dynasties, has had only one case, that of:*

***Norvell Bligh,*** *whose specialty is dreaming up bloody events for Field Days, the future equivalent of Roman circuses, and who wants to adopt his wife's daughter Alexandra, born in Belly Rave of a previous marriage. Bligh, however, has been double-*



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*crossed into loss of contract status and his bubble house, and has been moved into Belly Rave by a police convoy. Meanwhile, Mundin finds himself the recipient of a doubtful political favor, the case of:*

***Norma** and **Don Lavin**, offspring of the Lavin who invented the bubble house and whose initial is the L of G-M-L Homes. Through legal trickery after their father's death, Norma and Don's 25 per cent share of all G-M-L stock has been tied up . . . and Don, the victim of severe conditioning that has left him vacant-eyed, is unable to remember where the stocks are or even to discuss the matter. He and his sister Norma live in Belly Rave with:*

***Ryan**, an old-time corporation lawyer, whose addiction to drugs has ruined his career, but who can still act as attorney of record while Mundin does the legwork and carries out Ryan's strategy. Mundin realizes that Ryan's strategy is clever—for G-M-L Homes, obviously worried by it, have had Norma Lavin abducted. With her gone and her brother a psychological blank—except when G-M-L is mentioned—the case looks as hopeless as Mundin's future and as dangerous as living in Belly Rave, where, he suspects, he may wind up before long as a permanent resident!*

## IX

NORVELL was lying on a cake of ice. He kept trying to explain to someone enormous that he was sorry for everything, that he'd be a good and dutiful son or husband or friend or whatever he was supposed to be, if only the someone would leave him alone.

But that enormous someone, who couldn't have been Norvell's father, because Norvell didn't even remember his father, only put his hand before his mouth and tittered and looked down from a long flight of stairs, and then, when Norvell was least expecting it, reached out and swatted him across the ear and sent him skidding across the enormous cake of ice into the tittering face of Alexandra and the jagged, giant teeth of Virginia—

Norvell woke up.

He was very cold, very stiff. He looked dazedly around him. The living room. But—

Yes, it was the living room. With the wall pattern off and no light except a sickly dawn from outside. All the walls were on full transparent and he was lying on the floor. The bed he had dialed out to sleep in had folded into the basic cube, dumping him on the floor. And the floor was cold.

No heat—no power—the house was cold.



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He got up, wincing, and sidled hopelessly to the window control. It didn't respond. The windows remained full transparent.

HE knew what had happened and swore between clenched teeth. The skunks! Turning off the place without a word of warning, at daybreak, without even giving him a chance to . . .

Wearily, he began picking up his clothes from the floor where a rack had dumped them when it had folded back. Through the indecently transparent windows, he saw the other bubble houses, all respectably opaqued, with only their nightlights and entry lights.

By the time he was dressed, he began to hear a clamor upstairs. His wife and daughter charged down in negligées, commanding him to do something about it.

"Get dressed," he said and pointedly disconnected his hearing aid.

He rambled about the house while they did so. Absently, he tried to make coffee and gave up with a half-laugh when the water would not flow. The closets, drawers and dressers had rejected all their contents, upstairs and down. Pushers had calmly shoved them out and the doors had closed and locked—to him, forever. He contemplated the disordered piles of clothes and kitchenware and began to pack a traveling case.

Two bored policemen wandered in; the door, of course, was no longer on lock. He plugged in his hearing aid, taking plenty of time about it.

"Well?" he asked.

They told him he had plenty of time—they weren't in any hurry. "Take an hour if you need it, bub." They'd tote him and his family and their stuff out to Belly Rave, help him pick out a good place.

The moving had a golden moment. One of the cops helpfully picked up a suitcase. Alexandra told him to remove his *filthy hands from—*

The cop clouted her and explained they didn't take none of that off Belly Rave brats.

The police car handed Norvell a jolt.

It was armored.

"You—you get a lot of trouble in Belly Rave?" he guessed.

The friendlier of the cops said, "Only once in a while. They haven't jumped a squad car in six months, not with anything but pistols, anyway. You'll be okay."

They pulled away from Monmouth G-M-L Unit W-97-AR. There was no sentiment to the parting. Norvell was sunk in worry, Alexandra was incandescent but still. And Virginia had


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not said two words to anyone that morning.

THE car paused at the broad beltway circling the bubble-city, its motor idling, its driver impatiently talking into his radio. Finally, two more police cars rolled up and the three of them, in convoy, left the city roads for the cracked asphalt that led to Belly Rave. Once the road they traveled had been a six-lane superhighway, carrying a hundred thousand commuters' cars, morning and night. Now it wound through a scraggly jungle and the toll booths at the interchanges had crumbled into rock piles and rust.

They bumped along for a couple of miles, then turned off into a side road that was even worse.

The first thing that hit Norvell was the smell.

The second thing was worse—the horrible feeling of betrayal. Belly Rave, in its teeming ruin, was worse than anything Norvell had dreamed.

The convoying cars pulled up ahead and behind. A cop got out of each and stood ankle-deep in weeds and refuse, a hand idly resting on his gun.

Norvell's driver said, "This one will do. Let's go."

The act of moving their possessions into the house in the driving rain, ringed by an audience of blank-faced Belly Ravers, was mercifully blurred in Norvell's mind. At one moment, he was sitting in the police car, staring in disbelief at the wretched kennel they were offering him. The next, the police cars were gone and he was sitting on a turned-up suitcase and Alexandra was whining, "Norvell, I've *got* to have something to eat before I absolutely *die*. It's been—"

"Shut up," Virginia said levelly to her daughter. "Norvell, help me get the big suitcase upstairs."

She kicked a heap of rattling cans out of her way and headed for a flight of steps, ignoring her daughter.

Norvell followed her up the narrow broken stairs. The upper floor—Expansion Attic for Your Growing Family, the billboards had said—was soggy with rain, but Virginia found a spot where no water was actually dripping in. He dropped the suitcase there.

"Go on down and watch the other stuff," she ordered. "I'm going to change my clothes."

Before she got down, they had company—three men in ragged windbreakers.

"Police," one of them said, flashing something metallic in Norvell's face. "Just a routine check. You people got any valuables, alcoholic beverages, nar-



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cotics or weapons to register?"

Norvell protested, "The police just left."

"Bubble-town police, buster," the man said. "They got no jurisdiction here. Come on, what've you got to register?"

NORVELL shrugged feebly. "Nothing, I guess. Unless you count our clothes."

The men moved purposefully toward the bags. "Just clothes? No guns or liquor?"

Virginia's high, clear voice came down from the stairs. "You're damned right we have guns! You bums scram before you find out the hard way!"

Norvell, eyes popping, saw an old-fashioned revolver in her hand.

"Just a minute, sister," one of the men objected.

"Beat it!" she snapped.

They were gone, swearing.

Virginia handed the gun to Norvell. "Keep it," she said coldly. "Looks better if you have it. Just in case you were wondering, there aren't any cops in Belly Rave."

Norvell swallowed. He hefted the gun cautiously. It was far heavier than his unskilled imagination would ever have estimated. "Where did you get this thing?"

"Used to be Tony's, before he died. There's lesson one for you —you don't live in Belly Rave without a gun."

Alexandra came forward with shining eyes. "You were *wonderful!*" she breathed. "Those detestable *brutes* — heaven only knows *what* would have happened to me if just *Norvell* had been here!"

She started to plant a wet kiss on her mother's cheek. Virginia shoved her daughter away. "We'll have no more of that cack. From now on, you're going to level with me—and with Norvell, too. Hear me? We can't afford lying, faking, doublecrossing or temperament. The first bad break you make, I'll sell you like a shot."

Alexandra's face was a study in terror.

"Sink or swim—you're in Belly Rave now. You don't remember, but you'll learn. You'd better—fast. Now get out of here. If you can't scrounge something to eat, go hungry. But don't come back until sundown."

The child stood blankly. Virginia took her by the shoulder, pushed her through the door, slammed it behind her.

Norvell looked through a chink in the boarding of the cracked picture window and saw Alexandra plodding hopelessly down the battered walk, weeping.

Uncertainly, he asked Virginia—the *new* Virginia— "What



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was that about selling her?"

"What I said. You can always find a fagin or a madam for a kid. I don't know how prices are now—when I was thirteen, I brought fifty dollars."

Norvell, his hair standing on end, said, "*You?*"

"I guess I was lucky—they sold me to a fagin, not into a house. He ran a tea pad. I helped him roll the clientele. That's where I met Tony. Now, if there are no more useless questions, help me unpack."

HE helped her, his head whirling. Without shame or apology, she had demolished the story he had painstakingly built up from her "accidental" hints and revelations over the years. The honest, industrious parents. The frugal, rugged life of toil. The warmth of family feeling, drawn together by common need. The meeting with Tony Elliston—glamorous, advantage-taking cad from the Field Day crowd. Not a bad fellow. "But not love, Norvell—not what *we* have."

He had thought himself clever. He had pieced it together into a connected tale, chuckling privately because she couldn't know how much she had "unwittingly" revealed.

And all the while she had been a pickpocket in a dope joint, sold into it by her parents.

There was a knock on the door.

Virginia said, through her teeth, "If that brat's come back before I told—" and swung it open. She screamed.

Norvell found he had the revolver in his hand, pointing it at the middle of the hulking, snaggle-toothed figure in the doorway.

The figure promptly raised its enormous hands over its shock-haired head, grinning.

"Don't shoot, mister. I know I'm not pretty, but I'm harmless. Came here to help you out. Show you where to register and all. The name's Shep. I'll give you a fair shake. Show you the best places for firewood, wise you up on the gangs. Hear you have a little girl. You want to sell her, I'll get you a price. You want to go into business, I can put you next to a guy who'll start you out with hemp seed. If you got real money, I know a sugar dealer and a guy with a still to rent. I'm just Shep, mister. I'm just trying to get along."

Virginia said, "Keep the gun on him, Norvell. Shep, you come in and sit down. What do you want?"

"Surplus rations," the giant said with a childlike smile. "Cash, if you have any. I'm always desperate, but right now I'm out of my mind." His arm swept at the open door. "See the rain? It's the front end of the rain-



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bow, mister. See it? I have to catch it. And to catch it, I've got to have some crimson lake. Some other things, too, but the crimson lake. You don't see crimson in it, do you? Well, you won't see crimson in the canvas, but it'll be there—in the underpainting—and, because it's there, I'll have the pot of tears, the bloody, godawful rainsweep caught gloomdriving down on two hundred thousand desolations."

Norvell, lowering the pistol, said stupidly, "You paint."

"I paint. And for fifty bucks I can get what I need, which leaves me only the problem of getting fifty bucks."

VIRGINIA said, "With your build, you could get it."

"Not like you mean. Not since I started painting. So I run errands. Any errands? I've got to raise the fifty before the rain stops."

Virginia appeared to come to a conclusion. "Norvell, give Shep fifty dollars." He shot his wife a horrified look. That would leave them with eighteen dollars and sixty-five cents. But she wasn't even looking at him. She told Shep, "You'll work for it. One week's hard work. The outhouse is probably afloat. The chimney looks like it's blocked. We need firewood. This place needs patching all around. Also, my husband doesn't know the ropes and he might get in trouble. You'll watch him?"

"For fifty, sure. Want me to watch the kid?"

"No," she said shortly.

"You know what you're doing, lady. It'll be rough on her. Can I have the fifty now? It'll take ten bucks for the kid who does the running. *I can't miss this rain.*"

Norvell counted out fifty dollars and handed them over.

"Okay!" Shep boomed happily. "We'll get my crimson lake out of the way, then registration."

They walked through the driving rain to a tumbledown building guarded by a rat-faced boy of twelve. Shep told him cryptically, "Got a message for Monmouth."

The boy hooted mournfully, "Wa-wa-wa-wa-wabbit twacks!"

Norvell blinked. Kids—everywhere—from nowhere! Gimlet-eyed, appearing silently from the rain shroud.

Shep told them, "Like last time, but with *crimson lake,* too. Got it?"

A haggard girl of perhaps thirteen said dispassionately, "Cack like last time. The Goddams joined up with the Goering Grenadiers. It'll be a busted-bottle job getting through the West Side."

"I'm in a hurry, Lana. Can you do it or can't you?"



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Mildly, she told him, "Who said 'can't'—you or me? I said it'd be a busted-bottle job."

The rat-faced twelve-year-old said sullenly, "Not me. They know I was the one got Stinkfoot's kid brother. Besides, what about the Willowdale—"

"Shut your mouth about Willowdale," Lana blazed. The boy cowered away. "Bwuther wabbits, inspection—*harms!*"

Jagged glass edges flashed. Norvell gulped in horror.

"Good kids," Shep said approvingly and handed Lana the fifty dollars.

"Wa - wa - wa - wa - wabbit twacks!" she hooted and the kids vanished back into the shrouding rain.

TRUDGING after Shep through the floods, Norvell asked no questions. He had learned that much, at least.

The Resident Commissioner lived in an ordinary house, to Norvell's surprise. He had expected to see the man responsible for the allowances of thousands of people in a G-M-L. Certainly his rank entitled him to one.

Then Norvell saw the Resident Commissioner. He was a dreary old political hack. He told Norvell vaguely, "Carry your cards at all times. Be sure and impress that on your wife and the little girl. There's all kinds of red tape to getting duplicate cards, and you might go hungry for a week before they come through, if you lose these. As head of the family, you get a triple ration and there's a separate one for the wife. Is the little girl a heavy eater?"

Norvell guessed so.

"Well, we'll give her an adult ration then. Lord knows there's no shortage of food. Let's see, we'll make your hours of reporting on Wednesdays, between three and five. It's important to keep to your right hours, otherwise there's likely to be a big rush here sometimes and nobody at all others. Is all that clear? You'll find that it's mostly better to travel in groups when you come down for your allowance. Shep can tell you about that. It—prevents trouble. We don't want any trouble here." He tried to look stern. He added pathetically, "*Please* don't make trouble in my district."

He consulted a checklist. "Your ration cards entitle you and the whole family to bleacher seats at all bouts and Field Days." Norvell's heart was torn by the words. The rest was a blur. "Free transportation, of course—hope you'll avail yourself—no use to stay home and brood—little blood clears the air—door always open . . . "

Outside, in the rain, Norvell asked Shep, "Is *that* all he does?"



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Shep looked at him. "Is there something else to do?" He swung around. "Let's get some firewood."

## X

AS a disappearing act, it was a beaut. Mundin had tried everything. No Norma Lavin. After Ryan's phone call, the track was lost.

He went first to the police, of course. When he told them Norma Lavin was a Belly Raver, they tried not to laugh in his face.

"Look, mister," a kindly Missing Persons sergeant explained. "People are one thing—Belly Ravers are something else. Are these people on the tax rolls? Do they have punch-card codes? Do they have employment contract identification tattoos? No, they don't. So what can we do? We can find missing persons, sure, but this girl ain't a person—she's a Belly Raver. Maybe she just took a notion to wander off. Maybe she's got her toes turned up in a vacant lot. We just wouldn't know, see?"

But he took Charles Mundin's name, just in case. Mundin found himself making regular trips to the Lavin-Ryan home, loaded down with groceries. He also found that Ryan was tapping him for cash to buy drugs.

Don Lavin was sinking into a kind of catatonia without his sister. Ryan, alternately coldly confident with a bellyful of yen pox and devoured by the weeping shakes, begged Mundin to try something, anything. Mundin tried a doctor.

The doctor made one visit—during which Don Lavin, sparked by some flickering pride, rallied wonderfully and conversed good-humoredly with the doctor. The doctor left, with an indignant glare at Mundin, and Don lapsed back into his twilight gloom.

"All right, Ryan," Mundin said bitterly, "now what?"

Ryan shook the last pill out of the tin, swallowed it and told Mundin now what.

And Mundin found himself calling on his old schoolmate, William Choate IV.

POOR Willie's office was a little smaller than a landing field. He sprinted the length of it to embrace good old Charles.

"Gosh!" he burbled. "I'm so glad you could come and see me! They just put me in here, after old Sterling died. It used to be his office, see? So when he died, they put—"

"I see," Mundin said gently. "They put you in here."

"Yep. Say, Charles, how about some lunch?"



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"Maybe. Willie, I need a little help."

Willie said reproachfully, "Now, Charles, it *isn't* about a job again, is it? Gee, that's an awful spot to put me in."

Well, Mundin thought, they had succeeded in beating one thing into Willie's head, though not two. "I just want a little advice. I'd like to know when and where the annual stockholder's meeting of G-M-L Homes comes off."

Willie said happily, "I don't know. Don't they have to publish it somewhere? In a newspaper?"

"Yes, they have to publish it in a newspaper, Willie. The trick is to find out what newspaper. There are maybe fifty thousand of them in the country and the law just says that it has to be published in one—not necessarily English language either."

Willie looked sorrowful. "I only speak English, Charles."

"Why don't you ask your Periodical Research Department?"

Willie nodded vigorously. "Oh, sure, Charles—anything to oblige. Anything at all!" Willie uncertainly asked his squawk-box whether they had anything like a Periodical Research Department, and the squawk-box said, "yes, sir," and connected him.

Half an hour later, while Mundin was deep in the intricacies of the preliminary pre-hearing of the Group E Debenture Holders' Protective Committee, the squawk-box coughed and announced that the G-M-L Homes meeting was advertised in the Lompoc, California, *Intelligencer*. Time, day after tomorrow. Place, Room 2003, Administration Building, Morristown, Long Island.

"*Whew!*" said Willie dubiously. "They won't get many people to come *there*, will they?"

"One too many," Mundin said.

THE next morning, Mundin was waiting at a two-dollar ticket window of the New York Stock Exchange when the opening bell rang.

He examined the crumpled instructions from Ryan nervously, as sweating and tense as any of the passionate throng of devotees pressing around him, but for other reasons.

Ryan's instructions were complete and precise, except for one thing—they didn't tell him what bets to make. Mundin swore under his breath, shrugged and swiftly punched Number 145. Anaconda Copper. He inserted his token, threw the lever and tore off his ticket. At 19,999 other windows in the gigantic hall, 19,999 other investors were doing the same. And outside, on the polychrome street, ten thousand



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latecomers were waiting for their turn inside.

The angular Big Board in the center of the hall flashed and twinkled—fast, then slow. The lights stopped. The parimutuel computers began to hum.

Mundin leveled his field glasses on 145, but it was hard to stay on it. His hands were trembling.

The gong rang and the line he was watching flashed:

145, up 3.

The great hall trembled with noise, of which Mundin's obscene monosyllable was only the twenty-thousandth part. A lousy six cents profit. Not worth taking to the cashier's window.

A passing broker, a grimy Member's button in his lapel, said intimately, "Hey, bud—watch metals."

"Beat it or I'll have you run in," Mundin snapped. He had no time to waste on phony touts. He swept his field glasses over the Big Board, trying to make some sense out of the first movement of the day.

Industrials were down an average of four, the helpful summary told him. Rails—meaning, mostly, factory-site land developments—were up three. Chemicals, up eight.

Mundin figured—that meant the investors would lay off chemicals because they would figure everybody would be on chemicals because of the rise—except for the investors, who would be on chemicals because they would figure everybody would lay *off* chemicals, because they'd figure everybody would be *on* chemicals. Because of the rise.

Thirty-second warning bell.

"Bud," said the broker insistently, "*Watch metals!*"

"Go to hell," Charles said hoarsely, his fingers shaking over the buttons. He punched Anaconda again, bought five tickets and waited.

WHEN he heard the great groan at last, he opened his eyes and swept the board with his glasses.

145, up 15

"Remember who told ya," the broker was saying.

Mundin gave him a dollar. "Thanks, bud," the broker said. "Don't switch. Not yet. I'll tell ya when. This is a morning crowd—Tuesday morning at that. Not a crazy hysterical Monday-morning crowd that gets in fast and gets cleaned out fast. Look around and see for yaself. Little fellows taking a day off. The family men that play it smart—they think. Smart and small. I been watching them for twenny



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years. I tell you, don't switch."

Charles didn't switch.

He kept feeding a dribble of dollars to the broker, who was either lucky or a genius that day. By noon, Charles had a well-diversified portfolio of metals with a cash-in value of four hundred and eighty dollars.

"Now," the broker said hoarsely. He had borrowed Charles's field glasses to scan the crowd. "See? Some of them's leaving. Some of them's breaking out sanniches. The handle's dropping. They're getting not-so-smart now, not-so-small. I been watching them twenny years. Now they start doing the dopy things, because they're gettin' hungry and a hungry man ain't smart. Sell twenny points short. Jeez, I wish I had the nerve to say thirty!"

Two minutes later, he was pounding Charles on the back and yelling, "We made it, bud!"

Metals had broken—thirty-eight points. Charles, by now icy-calm, gave him five dollars. Step One in Ryan's instructions—build up a stake. He'd done that.

He turned the dial to the $500 range. "Give me a winner," he told the tout. "I'm in a hurry and this is taking too long."

The broker stammered: "Solid fuels ought to rise now. But—but please, bud, make it $250. One on solid fuels and one on—on . . . " He swept the board with his glasses. "Can's been sleepin' all day," he muttered. "A Tuesday crowd stays off Can, but after metals break . . . "

He said nervously, "Buy solid fuels and Can."

BY two in the afternoon, Charles had a cash-in value of $2,300 and the broker's pockets were bulging with small change. He was talking to himself in an undertone.

Charles said abruptly, "Okay. Now I want a share of G-M-L."

The broker blinked at him. "Old 333? You can't do that."

"I want it."

"Bud, you're new here; I been around for twenny years. They have an investor, see? All day long, he just punches 333. That's him over there, third tier, second aisle. Like Steel and P & A—they don't take no chances on anybody claimin' no stock."

"I want it," repeated Mundin.

"Ain't you made enough for one day? Come on, let's go get a drink. I'll buy. You fool around with the big boys, they *punish* you. Like G-M-L. You try to grab a share and you'll get hurt. Unlmited resources, see—un-*lim*-it-ed. Every movement, all day long, he has a 'buy' bid in. He bids *ten thousand bucks,* way over real value. You get a wild idea and bid over ten thousand and you'll get the stock, sure. So,


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next movement, what happens? He sells short, maybe. Maybe he waits. But sooner or later you're squashed. You know what they say, bud—'Him who sells what isn't his'n must buy it back or go to prison.' And plenty have."

Mundin said coldly, "What's G-M-L par?"

"Two thousand. But ya can't claim it, didn't I just tell you? He's got a bid in, every movement."

Charles set himself to persuade the broker to do what Ryan had planned. At last, the broker, shaking, stumbled off toward the third tier, second aisle. Mundin followed him with the field glasses.

It was working. Sweating, Mundin saw in miniature, through the glasses, the greeting, the silent shove, the wordless rejoinder, the growing heat of the quarrel. The G-M-L investor was a small, elderly fat man. The broker was small, too, but lean and wiry.

The fight broke out as the thirty-second warning bell rang. Charles took his eyes off the the fighters and the for-once-untended investor's window and punched four $250 tickets on Old 333.

ONE bid and no offerings did not constitute a transaction according to the electronic definitions of the New York Stock Exchange parimutuel machine. As it had all day, the Big Board said—

333, no change

One bid and no offerings. In a claiming movement, it meant a quick profit—the difference between the bid and the par value. An investor next to Charles, eying him respectfully, said, "What do ya like in Chemicals, bud?"

Mundin ignored him. He left his station, almost regretfully, and took the escalator up to the cashier's window marked: *Industrials*—$1,000 *and up.*

"Two thousand dollars," said the bored clerk, inspecting the tickets, glancing at his miniature of the Big Board, noting the *no change*. He began to count out hundred-dollar bills.

"I'm claiming," Mundin said through stiff lips.

The clerk suddenly awakened. "Old 333! How'd you do it?"

"I'm claiming two thousand dollars par value."

The clerk shrugged and tapped out an order on his keyboard. Moments later, one share of G-M-L Homes voting common stock fluttered from a slot in the desk. The clerk filled in Charles' name and home address and recorded them.



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"You'll get that to the company's board of directors immediately?" the attorney asked.

"It's automatic," said the clerk. "It's in their files now. Say, mister, if you don't mind telling me how you pulled it off—"

He was being much too affable—and Charles, looking closer, saw the little ear plug of a personal receiver. He was being stalled.

He darted into the crowd.

The two gambles had paid off, Mundin realized, heading for the street and Belly Rave. He had the stake—and he had his single share of stock in G-M-L Homes, entitling him to a seat at the annual stockholders' meeting.

Now the real gambling would begin.

Mundin whistled for a cab. There was some commotion behind him, but the cab came before Mundin had time to notice that the man who was being worked over, in broad daylight, by three huskies, was a small, wiry man with a Member's button in his lapel.

## XI

"GETTING on toward noon," Shep said. "Let's find a restaurant."

"A restaurant?" Norvie Bligh goggled. He followed Shep down the littered, filthy street, wondering. In a week, he thought he had learned something about Belly Rave under Shep's tutelage. But he had seen no neon-glittering, glass-fronted havens.

What Shep led him to was just another Belly Rave house. A wheezing old crone crept around the living room. There was a fire going in the fireplace and water bubbling in a blackened kettle. *Restaurant?*

Shep took a couple of rations from his pocket. He never seemed to be without a dozen or so. They were easy enough to get from the R.C.—you could claim you had a dozen dependents and he would apathetically list you for 273 rations a week. If you could lift them, they were yours. There was plenty of food.

And plenty of circuses.

Shep split the two-by-three-by-six plastic box with his thumbnail and Norvell clumsily followed suit. Things tumbled out. Shep tossed one of the "things"—an unappetizing little block of what looked like plastic-wrapped wood—to the crone. She caught it and gobbled it down.

"Business not so good?" Shep asked casually.

She glared at him, bailed water out of the kettle with a rusted can and slopped it into his plastic ration box. Shep popped open a little envelope and sprinkled a dark powder on the water.



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*Coffee!* The magic smell made Norvell suddenly ravenous. He handed the crone a similar block from his own ration, got his water, made his coffee, and greedily explored the other things that had come out of the box.

Biscuits. A tin of meat-paste. A chewy block of compressed vegetables. Candy. Cigarettes. The combination was one he hadn't encountered before. The meat-paste was highly spiced but good.

Shep watched as he gobbled. "When you've eaten each menu ten thousand times—well, I won't discourage you."

OUTSIDE, Norvell asked shyly what in the world the old woman thought she was doing for a living.

"It's simple," said Shep. "She gets her rations and trades them for firewood. She uses the wood to heat water—for coffee, or bouillon, or tea, or whatever. She trades the water for rations. She keeps hoping that some day she'll come out ahead on the deal. She never has."

"But *why?*"

"Because it makes her feel like a human being."

"But—"

"But, hell! It's hard to starve to death in Belly Rave; in a bad week, though, she comes close to it. She's risking her capital in the hope of gain. What if she always loses? She's *doing* something—not just sitting and waiting for ration day to roll around again."

Norvell nodded. He could see how it would make irresistible, unarguable sense, after the ten-thousandth of each menu. Those who could do anything, anything at all, would try anything, anything at all.

It gave him a clue to the enigma named Shep. He said comprehendingly, "So she has her restaurant, and you have your art, and—"

The giant turned on him. "You little louse! If you ever say, or hint, or *think* that I'm just piddling around to kill the time, I'll snap you in two!"

In a clear, intuitive flash, Norvell realized that he had said the unspeakable. He managed to say, very sincerely, "I'm sorry, Shep."

His knees were shaking and his heart was pounding, but it was only adrenalin, not fear. He knew what torment had driven this placid hulk to rage—incessant, relentless, nagging self-doubt. Where leisure is compulsory, how can you tell the burning drive to create from its sterile twin, "puttering"? You can't. And the self-doubt must remain forever unresolved, forever choked down, forever rising again.

Norvell added honestly, "I



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won't say that again. I won't even think it. Not out of fear of you, but because I know it's not so." He hesitated. "I—I used to think I was a kind of artist myself. I know what you must be going through."

Shep grumbled, "Bligh, you're just beginning to find out what you go through—but I'm sorry I blew my top."

"Forget it." They walked on.

AT last, Shep said, "Here's where we get some more supplies." The place was one of the inevitable picture-window, fieldstone-chimney ruins, but with a fenced-in yard. The gate had a lock on it. Shep kicked the gate down, tearing out the hinges and the staples of the hasp.

Norvell said, "Hey!"

"We do this my way. *Stearns!*"

A grim, gray man threaded his way to them around stacks of plastic fittings, guttering and miscellaneous. "Hello, Shep," he said flatly. "What do you want?"

"You hijacked repair materials that a couple of friends of mine got through legitimate black-market channels. I want them back—with interest."

"Still on the protection kick, Shep?" the man asked, his voice ugly. "If you had any sense, you'd come in with me."

"I don't work for anybody, Stearns. I do favors for a few friends, they do favors for me. Trot out your team, Titan of Industry."

Shep, so fast to resent the slur himself, was insensitive enough to use it on others. With the same results.

Stearns' face went pasty with rage and Norvell knew what was coming next—unless he moved fast. "*Stearns!*" he yelled, and used the moment's delay to draw the pistol that Virginia had ordered him to carry. Stearns' hand stopped at his lapel and slowly, unwillingly, dropped to his side.

Shep gave Norvell a quick, approving glance. "Trot out your team, Stearns."

Stearns didn't look away from the gun in Norvell's hand. "Chris! Willie! Get the truck."

The truck was a two-wheeler stake job with one starved-looking teen-ager pulling between poles and another pushing against a canvas breast-band. Walking Stearns before him, Shep ordered him to pick up this or that article of building material and put it on the truck. He topped the load with a rusty pick and shovel from the tool shed, then told Chris and Willie, "Roll it, kids. It won't be far."

Norvell didn't pocket his gun until they had put three blocks between themselves and Stearns' final malevolent glare.

There were two stops before



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they headed for Norvell's home. At each of them, a part of the supplies was unloaded, to the tearful thanks of sober-looking citizens who had thought them gone forever—and, with them, the months of accumulation, gambling and wangling that had earned them in the first place.

Norvell, eying the heaving, panting teen-agers, suggested uneasily, "Let's give them a hand with the truck."

Shep shook his head. "Our job is convoying."

BUT there was no trouble. The kids rolled the cart to the door of Norvell's house and unloaded the firewood and building materials, stacking them on the shredded broadloom that covered the floor of the sunken living room.

Virginia cast an appraising eye over the neat heaps. "No tar paper, linoleum, anything like that?"

Shep guffawed. "No diamonds, either. You think your roof is the only one that leaks? You're lucky—you got two finished floors. Let the top one get soaked. You'll be all right down here."

"Cack," she said and Norvell winced. "If you can't get tar paper, see if you can find something else to make shingles out of. Sheet tin will do."

"So will the roof off a G-M-L," Shep said sourly, but he made a note. He tossed a couple of rations to the waiting kids, who took them and pushed their empty truck away. "Anything else?"

Virginia, suddenly a hostess, said, "Oh, I suppose not. Care for a drink?"

Norvell, for politeness' sake, took a sip of the bottle Virginia produced. "Ration-jack," she called it, obtained by trading firewood with the evil-eyed octogenarian in the house next door. It tasted like the chewy fruit bars he had enjoyed until then, when he found them in his ration pack. But the taste was overlaid with the bite of alcohol. Beer was what he really liked. They didn't seem to have any in Belly Rave, though.

Norvell let the conversation drift past him. He sat back, bone-weary. Physical weariness was a new thing to Norvie Bligh. He had never had it as a child, never had it at General Recreations. Weariness was not one of the fixtures that came with possession of a G-M-L bubble house, it seemed.

Why was it that doing nothing involved physical labor, while doing actual creative, productive work—running a Field Day, for instance—involved only the work of the mind? Norvie admitted it to himself: already he was taking



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on the coloration of Belly Rave. Like all its discouraged, hopeless inhabitants, he was living for the day and ignoring the morrow. Rations and a place to sleep. It would not be long, he told himself bitterly, before he would be one of the simians queueing up at Monmouth Stadium.

Unless he found something else to do.

But what was there to do? Work on the house? The essentials were done. The bars were up, the trash had been carted out into the street, where it would slump into a featureless heap like all the other middens along the road. The less urgent things couldn't be done. You couldn't fix the lesser roof leaks—no shingles. You couldn't fix the stairs—no materials, no tools. Above all, no skill.

HE said excitedly, oblivious to the fact that he was interrupting, "Virginia! How about starting a garden? A couple of fruit trees—orange, maybe. A few rows of—"

Virginia laughed almost hysterically. Even Shep chuckled. She said, "Orange trees don't grow around here, my dear husband. Nothing else does, either. You start digging out there and first you go through two feet of garbage and trash, then maybe six inches of cinder and fill. Then you hit the real pay-dirt—sand."

Norvell sighed. "There must be *something* to do."

Shep suggested, "You could paint your dump, if you're feeling ambitious. I know where there's some house paint."

Norvell sat up, interested. He accepted the bottle of ration-jack and took a small swallow. "Why not? No reason why we can't keep the place looking decent, is there?"

Shep shrugged. "Depends. If you want to start some kind of a business, paint's a good advertisement. If you want to just drift, maybe you don't want to advertise. You make yourself too conspicuous and people get ideas."

Norvell said, dampened, "You mean robbers?"

Virginia reached for the bottle of ration-jack. "Cack," she said bluntly, taking a long swallow. "We aren't painting."

There was a long pause. In the G-M-L bubble house, Norvell reminded himself, Virginia had never let there be any doubt who was boss—but she had seldom shown it in front of outsiders.

They weren't in the bubble house any more, however.

*I want Arnie,* Norvell cried to himself, suddenly miserable. It isn't working out right at all, not the way Arnie said it would. He'd



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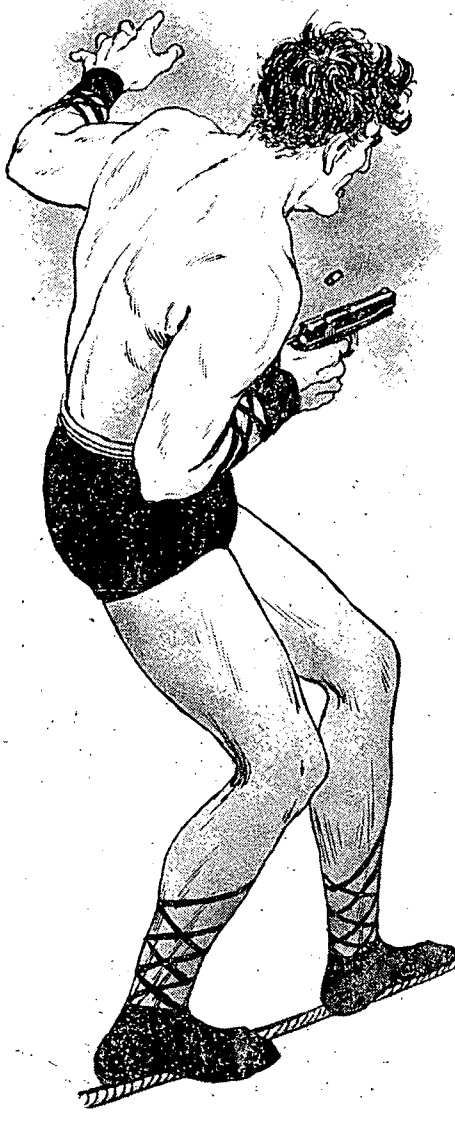

said it would be a chance for Norvie to express himself, to make something of his marriage, to be on his own. And it wasn't that at all!

He reclaimed the bottle of ration-jack. It still tasted quite disgusting, but he gagged down a long drink.

SHEP was saying, " . . . didn't do so badly today. Stearns gave me a little trouble. If Norvie hadn't held a gun on him, I might not have got the stuff so easy."

Virginia looked at her husband appraisingly. But all she said to Norvie was, "You better keep an eye on that gun. Alexandra tried to sneak out with my kitchen knife today."

"Eh?" Norvie was jolted.

"Put on quite a scene," her mother said, almost admiringly. "She's getting in with the Goering Grenadiers and it seems they pack knives and guns. They look down on the Wabbits and their busted bottles."



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"Does she *have* to do that?"

Shep said grimly, "If she wants to stay alive, she does. Get it straight, Norvie — this is Belly Rave, not a finishing school. It's a permanent Field Day, only without rules."

Now *there* was something he knew about, Norvell thought, brightening. "You ever go in for a Field Day?"

"Nope. Just the weeklies."

"Oh, you ought to, Shep. That's where the real money is.

And it's not very dangerous if you play it smart. Take spear-carrying in Spillane's Inferno, for instance. Safe as houses. And from the artistic side, let me tell you from experience that—"

"Cack on spear-carrying, Bligh," Shep said, with a wire edge in his voice. "I don't do that any more. I've been there, sticking the poor slobs who fall off the high wire before they reach the blonde. I've even been on the wire myself—once." He reached for the ration-jack, his face blank. "She missed me with all eight shots. I fractured her femur with my first. And then I dropped the gun."

He took a huge drink. "They booed me. I didn't get the mid-



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riff bonus or the navel superbonus. I didn't want them. All I wanted was some brushes, some canvas, some graphite sticks and some colors. I got them, Bligh, and I found out I couldn't use them. Not for six damned months. And then I couldn't paint anything except her face when the slug hit her thigh and she fell off the perch."

Norvell contemplated the ration-jack bottle with distaste. He got to his feet, weaving slightly. "I—I think I want some air. Excuse me."

"Certainly," said Virginia, not even looking at him. As Norvell went out the door, he heard her ask Shep, "This blonde you shot —was she pretty?"

## XII

MUNDIN was not followed from the Stock Exchange. He got to Belly Rave by late afternoon, his share of G-M-L Common securely tucked in a pocket.

"Ah!" exclaimed Ryan, coherently jubilant. "One share voting. The meeting is tomorrow—and accessory before the fact to simple assault. A good day's work, Counselor."

"I hope this share is going to be enough to get me in," Mundin said anxiously. "What if it isn't entered or they challenge it?"

"They can't. *Id certum est quid reddi potest,* Counselor."

"But *affirmantis est probatio,* you know."

Ryan grinned amiably. "Score one for your side. If they won't let you in, we'll have to think of something else, that's all."

"You've been right so far, though." Mundin stood up and took a turn around the dingy room, tripping over Don Lavin's feet. "Sorry," he said to the sprawling youth, trying not to look at the staring, shining eyes. There was an excellent chance, he realized, that what had happened to Don Lavin might, sooner or later, happen to himself if he persisted in sticking his nose into the corporate meatgrinders.

Mundin asked, "Nothing new about Norma?"

Ryan shook his head. "You'll have to pry her loose from them tomorrow. Wish I could go with you . . . "

"Oh, by all means, come along," Mundin said sarcastically. "Love to have you. You'll like Morristown—it's so much like Belly Rave."

"I'd never stand the trip. You'll have to play it yourself, Counselor. I have confidence in you. Just keep your head and remember the essential nature of a great private utility corporation."

"A legal entity. A fictive person."



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The old eyes were gleaming in the ruined face. "Forget that. Think of an oriental court, a battlefield, a government, a poker game that never ends. The essence of a corporation is the subtle flux of power, now thrusting this man up, now smiting this group low. You can't resist power, boy, but you can guide it." He reached shakily for the battered tin of pills. "Oh, you'll manage. The thing for you to do now is to vanish. Get lost. Don't be seen until you turn up at the meeting. And don't go to your office or apartment." He glanced meaningfully at Don Lavin and Mundin cringed.

"What then?" Mundin demanded. "You want me to stay here?"

"Anywhere out of sight."

Mundin looked at his watch. If he could only go to bed now and wake up just in time to start for the meeting! But he had nearly twenty-four hours to kill. Twenty-four hours in which to think and get nervous and lose the sharp edge of determination.

"I'm going out," he said. "I don't know if I'll see you before the meeting or not."

HE said good-by to Don Lavin, who didn't notice him, and wandered through the growing dusk of Belly Rave. He changed direction a couple of times when he caught sight of what looked like purposeful groups of men or children ahead, but there was actually small chance of attack before the Sun went down.

He found himself nearing the General Recreations recruiting station and felt somewhat more secure in the shelter of the inviting, pink-spun-candy-looking structure. General Recreations policed its area with its own guards.

Mundin studied the gaudy posters and the shuffling, gossiping men and women. It was the first time he had come really close to the raw material that Stadium shows were made of and he felt a little like an intruder. He had seen the shows themselves, of course—plenty of them. He had gone religiously to the Kiddies' Days back in Texas. As an adolescent, he had been a rootin', tootin' red-hot fan, as able as any to spout the log-book records on hours in combat, percentage of kills, survival quotients.

Naturally, his enthusiasm had quieted down when the Scholarship people approved his application and he entered law school and he had never picked it up again. Nothing against the games, of course, but an attorney was expected to go in for more cerebral forms of amusements.

Like dodging creditors, he told himself bitterly.



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Somebody called from the mob, "Hey, Mr. Mundin!"

He started, half ready to run.

But it was only whatsisname—Norvell Bligh—the client Dworcas had sent.

But so shabby!

Then Mundin remembered. Bligh had lost out on his contract—with General Recreations, ironically enough. But still, to find him here!

The little man panted up to Mundin and wrung his hand. "My God, it's good to see a friendly face! Were you—were you looking for me, maybe?"

"No, Mr. Bligh."

Bligh's face fell. "I — uh — thought perhaps you might have a message for me—as my attorney, you know—maybe the Company . . . But they wouldn't, of course."

"No, they wouldn't," Mundin said gently. He looked around. He couldn't stand the little man's misery, nor could he hurt him by walking away. "Is there any place we can have a drink around here?"

"*Is* there! Mr. Mundin, the things I've seen in the week I've been here!"

He led off, with Mundin following. It was only half a block to the nearest blind pig. Bligh knocked. "Shep sent me," he told a bitter-faced woman through a peephole.

INSIDE, the place reeked of alcohol. They sat at plank tables in the wretched living room and, through the sloppy curtains, Mundin saw the gleam of copper tubing and shiny pots. They were the only customers at that hour.

The woman asked tonelessly: "Raisin-jack? Ration-jack? Majun? Reefers? Gin?"

"Gin, please," Mundin said hastily.

It came in a quart bottle. Mundin gasped when she asked for fifty cents.

"Competition," Bligh explained when she had gone. "If it was just me, she'd have sold it for twenty-five. But, of course, she could tell you were only slumming."

"Not exactly," Mundin said. "Health!"

They drank. Mundin felt as if somebody had smashed him on the back of the head with a padded mallet.

Hoarsely, he asked Bligh, "How have you been getting along?"

Tears were hanging in Bligh's eyes. "It's been hell, only one day of hell after another, and no end in sight. I wish to heaven I—" He stopped himself, sat up straighter. "Sorry. Been drinking the whole afternoon. Not used to it."

"That's all right."



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"Mr. Mundin, you can help me. *Please!* A big lawyer like you, candidate for the council and everything—I don't expect a contract and a G-M-L. I had them and I was a fool—I threw them away. But there must be some kind of a job, any kind, enough so I can get out of Belly Rave before I split right down the middle and—"

Mundin, thinking of his appeal to Willie Choate, said sharply, "I can't, Bligh. I don't have a job to give."

"Nothing I can do for you here, Mr. Mundin? I know the ropes—*ask* me!"

It was a new thought. Mundin said uncertainly, "Why—why, as a matter of fact, there just *might* be something, at that. I've been trying to locate—a friend here in Belly Rave. A girl named Norma Lavin. If you think you could help me find her . . . "

Bligh looked at him expressionlessly. "You want me to find you a girl?"

"A client, Bligh."

"I can do it, I bet! I've got friends—contacts. Just leave it to me. I'll handle it. You want to come along?"

Mundin hesitated. Why not? His job was to stay out of sight. Until the stockholders' meeting, at least.

"Certainly," he told Bligh. "Lead the way."

BLIGH led him through the growing dusk to a vacant lot, the burned-out site of one of Belle Reve's finest 40-by-60-foot estates. And then the little man cupped his hands to his mouth and hooted mournfully into the twilight, "Wa-wa-wa-wa-wabbit twacks!"

Mundin, stupefied, said, "What . . . ?"

A small figure oozed from the dusk. It asked suspiciously, "Who wants a Wabbit?"

Bligh proudly introduced Mundin. "This gentleman is looking for a young lady."

"Cack, buster! Us Wabbits don't—"

"No, no! A young lady who has disappeared."

Mundin added, "Norma Lavin is her name. Disappeared a week ago. Lived at 37598 Willowdale Crescent. Drove an old Caddy."

"Um. That's Gee-Gee territory," the shrill young voice informed them. "We got a Grenadier PW, though. What's in it for the Wabbits?"

Bligh whispered to Mundin, "Ten dollars."

Mundin said promptly, "Ten dollars."

"For a starter?"

"Sure."

"Come on." The Wabbit led them a desperate pace through a mile of Belly Rave. Once, a thick-set brute lunged at them



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from a doorway. The child snarled, "Lay off. *Wabbits!*" The man slunk back. There had been a flash of jagged bottle glass in the little fist.

They moved on. Then, a mounting chorus down a street, rhythmic and menacing: "Gah-*damn!* Gah-*damn!* Gah-*damn!*"

"In here!" The Wabbit darted into a darkened house. A startled old man and woman, huddled before the cold fireplace, looked once and then didn't look at the intruders again, having seen the busted-bottle insigne. The Wabbit said to Mundin, "Patrol. This is Goddam territory."

They watched through cracks in the warped boards that covered the splintered picture window. The Goddams, still chanting, came swinging past, perhaps fifty of them, expertly twirling improvised maces. Some carried torches.

The Wabbit, frowning, muttered, "That's no patrol. War party, heading west. No noise. There'll be a rear guard."

You could barely see them. They were black-clad. Their faces and hands were darkened.

"All right," the Wabbit said at last, and they slipped out. The old man and woman, still ignoring them, were munching rations and bickering feebly about who should chop up the chair to start a fire.

THEY dived into a house like any other house, except that it was full of pale, snake-eyed kids from eight to thirteen.

"Who're these?" a girl asked the Wabbit.

"Hello, Lana," Norvie Bligh said tentatively. She shriveled him with a glance and turned again to their guide.

"Customers," he said shrilly. "Missing person. Ten bucks. And something important: War party of Goddams heading west on Livonia Boulevard, the 453-hundred block, at 7:50. Fifty of them with those hatchets of theirs. Advance guard and rear guard."

"Good," she said calmly. "Not our pigeon; looks like a crib-house raid. Who's the missing person?"

Mundin told her.

Like the Wabbit guide before her, she said, "Um. Goering Grenadier territory. Well, we have one of them in the attic. Want us to ask him, mister—for fifty bucks?"

Mundin paid.

The Goering Grenadier in the attic was an eight-year-old scooped up in a raid on the headquarters of the Grenadiers itself. At first he would only swear and spit at them. Then Lana took over the interrogation. Charles left abruptly.

The Grenadier was still cry-



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ing when Lana joined them downstairs and said, "He talked."

"Where is she?"

"Fifty bucks more."

Mundin swore and searched his pockets. He had thirty-seven dollars and eighty-five cents. Lana accepted twenty-five on account.

She said, "Seems there's a Mr. Martinson. He has jobs for the Gee-Gees now and then. He told Grosse Hermann — that's their boss—that he wanted this Lavin dame picked up and doped. They were supposed to deliver her to some place on Long Island. The kid didn't go along, so he doesn't remember just where. Says if he heard it, he'd . . . "

Mundin was tearing upstairs. To the weeping child, he barked, "Room 2003, Administration Building, Morristown, Long Island?"

"That's it, mister," said the kid, sniffling. "I *told* her I'd remember!"

MUNDIN went back into the living room and leaned against a wall, brooding. So Norma was being kept on tap for the stockholder's meeting. Why? More conditioning? A forced transfer of her stock? No —Don Lavin's stock; she didn't have any. She was the legatee—her brother Don had the stock, having her irrevocable proxy.

So they would knock off her brother.

Mundin said to Lana, "Listen. You saw that I have no more dough right now. But I need help. This thing is big. There are —well, thousands involved." What a fool he would have been to tell the truth and say billions! "It's big and it's complicated. First, can you throw a guard around 37598 Willowdale? I think your friends the Grenadiers are overdue to kill a young man named Don Lavin." He didn't wait for an answer, but went right on, "Second, can you get me to the Administration Building in Morristown? You'll be taken care of if this thing breaks right."

Lana measured him with her eyes. "Can do. We can haggle later."

She barked orders. A silent group of children collected their broken bottles from the mantel over the wood-burning fireplace and slipped out.

Lana said definitely, "The Gee-Gees won't get to your friend. As for Morristown—well, if the Gee-Gees can make a delivery there, I guess I can. Frankly, I don't like it. Morristown's tough. But we have an arrangement with the Itty-Bitties there. They're rats; they use guns, but . . . "

She shrugged helplessly. You gotta go along, her shrug said.



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Mundin found himself escorted to the door. "Wait a minute," he said. "I want to hole up somewhere for the night. I'll meet you here in the morning, but what about right now?"

Bligh volunteered, "How about my place, Mr. Mundin? It isn't much, but we've got bars on the windows."

Lana nodded. "That'll do. In the morning—what now?"

One of the Wabbits had slipped in the door. "Gee-Gee scouts," he reported. "We got one of them, but there's a couple more around. Might be a raid."

"We'll fix them," Lana said grimly. "Guess they want their boy back. Come on, you two—I'll have to convoy you out of here."

She led the way. The street was black and silent. Before they had taken three steps, Lana was invisible. With some qualms, Mundin followed Bligh's confident stride.

LANA melted back out of the darkness and said, "Hold it! There's one of the Gee-Gees under that fence."

Her bottle glimmered. Bligh choked and tackled her from behind as she was about to slice into a pudgy young-girl face. Lana floundered on the ground, swearing, while Bligh snapped at his stepdaughter, "Sandy, get the hell out of here. These are friends of mine. I'll see you at home!"

Alexandra, wriggling as he clutched her arm, said philosophically, "Sorry, Norvell. That's the way the little ball bounces." She threw back her head in a barking, strangling yell: "Sieg—*heil!* Sieg—"

Norvell held off Lana with one hand and, with the other, measured the distance to Alexandra's jaw. He knocked her out, heaved her over his shoulder and said, panting, "Let's go, Mundin. You tag along, Lana."

After ten minutes, Mundin had to relieve the little man of Alexandra's weight. By the time Mundin's knees were buckling, the girl was coming to. He put her down and she trailed sulkily along with them.

Mrs. Bligh tried to raise hell when the four of them came in. "And," she screamed at Norvie, "where have *you* been? Out of here without a word—gone for hours—we could have . . . "

Norvell said it was none of her business. He said it in such a way that Alexandra gasped with indignation, Lana with admiration. Mundin blushed at the language, but reflected that Belly Rave was doing things to little Mr. Bligh. And the things were not all bad.

"And," Norvell concluded, "if I



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see any more monkey-business between that hairy ape Shep and you, there's going to be trouble!"

"*Hah!*" snorted Virginia Bligh. "I suppose you'll beat him up."

"He could break me in two. I'd wait until he went away and then I'd beat *you* up."

Lana said sweetly, "I'm going now. What about this little stinker?" She jerked a thumb at the sullen Alexandra.

"I'll take care of her," Bligh promised. "She didn't know any better, that's all."

Lana gauged him. "Okay. Be back in the morning." She was gone as Virginia Bligh, regaining her breath, started in for the second round.

Mundin said, "Please! I've got a hard day tomorrow—can I get some sleep?"

## XIII

THEY spent the morning in Old Monmouth, Mundin and Lana and Norvie Bligh, who tagged along in a sort of vague secretarial capacity.

First, they stopped by Mundin's bank, where he plugged in his key, punched *Close Account* and scooped up the bills that rolled out.

He counted morosely. Two hundred thirty-four dollars, plus eighty-five cents in change. Lana looked hungry and Mundin recalled that he still owed her twenty-five dollars balance from the night before. He gave it to her and said, too cheerfully, "Let's get something to eat."

They ate in Hussein's. Lana said, "I've been here before. That ward-heeler Dworcas is across the street, isn't he?"

Startled, Mundin said, "That's right. What were you doing here?"

"Things. Look, here comes a friend of yours."

It appeared to be one of Mundin's Ay-rab constituents-to-be. He said, "Effendi, I confess it. I was drunk when the day came and the judge insulted me."

Mundin said patiently, "I ought to tell you, Hamid, that I'm withdrawing from—" He stopped in time. Careful, he warned himself—better let things ride until after the stockholders' meeting. He amended it to, "I mean what's the trouble?"

"The inheritance from my father," the Ay-rab said bitterly. "It is a matter of Clark v. Allen, 91 L ed (Adv 1285), 170 ALR 953, 67 S Ct 1431." He was reading off a sheet of paper. "What this means, I do not know, but the judge insulted me."

"I'll look it up," said Mundin, taking the slip of paper with the annotation number on it. "What were you doing in court?"

"My father died," the Ay-rab



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explained. "There is a law that one must be a citizen to inherit, unless there is a treaty—and how can there be a treaty with Saudi Arabia, which no longer exists? I went to the court, Effendi."

"And you were drunk," said Mundin.

Hamid said gravely, "Effendi, it is even as your great poet Fitzgerald so beautifully wrote—

**"Indeed the Idols I have loved so long**
**Have done my Credit in this world much wrong:**
**Have drowned my Glory in a shallow Cup**
**And sold my Reputation for a Song."**

"Sure, Hamid, sure," said Mundin. "I'll look into it."

LUNCH continued without further interruption or much conversation. Over coffee, Lana said, brooding, "I guess the big shots'll ride out to Morristown in armored cars. Too bad we ain't rich. Well, let's get to the jumping-off place."

A taxi took them through the Bay tunnel to the Long Island Railroad terminus in Old Brooklyn. Just for the record, they tried the ticket window.

"No, sir," the man said positively. "One train a day, armored. For officials only. What the hell do you want out there, anyway?"

They canvassed the bus companies by phone, without luck.



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Outside the railroad station, at the head of the cab rank, Lana began to cry.

"There, little girl." One of the hackies soothed her, glaring at Mundin and Bligh. A fatherly type. "What's the matter?"

"It's my daddy," Lana bawled. "He's in that terrible place an' he's lost an' my mommy said we should go help him. Mister, just take us to the edge, please? An' Uncle Norvie and Uncle Charlie won't let anything bad happen if those bas—if those bad men in Morristown try anything. Honest!"

The hackie broke down and agreed to take them to the edge. It was a two-hour drive over bad roads. He let Lana ride next to him in the front. Swinging her little handbag gaily, with the volatility of a child, she chattered, all smiles, the whole way. Uncle Norvie and Uncle Charlie exchanged looks. They knew what was in the little handbag.

Morristown, being older, was better organized than Belly Rave. The driver stopped a couple of weed-grown blocks from the customs barrier.

"Here we are, little girl," he said tenderly.

The little girl reached into her handbag. She took out her busted bottle and conversed earnestly



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with the driver. He cursed and drove on.

At the gate, a couple of men looked genially inside. Lana whispered something—Mundin thought he caught the words "Wabbits" and "Itty-Bitties"—and the men waved them on. A block past the gate, on Lana's orders, the driver stopped at another check-point, manned by a pair of dirty-faced nine-year-olds.

They got a guide—an Itty-Bitty with a carbine. On their way through the busy brawling streets to the Administration Building, grownups got out of sight when they saw him clinging to the cab.

At the Ad Building, Lana said curtly to the driver, "Wait."

Mundin pointed to the steel-plated wheeled and tracked vehicles drawn up in the building's parking lot. "We get out of here in one of those or not at all."

Lana shrugged. "I don't get it, but all right." She told the Itty-Bitty, "Pass the cab out, will you? And whenever you guys need something in Belly Rave, you know who to come to."

IT was one o'clock—the meeting was scheduled for one-thirty. The check-point in the lobby passed Mundin and Bligh on the strength of Mundin's stock certificate. Lana was to wait in the visitor's room.

Some twenty men filled the meeting room. Quite obviously, they were Titans. Beside these richly, quietly dressed folk, Mundin and Bligh were shabby interlopers.

They were also ridiculously young and awkward.

*From here on, it gets hard,* Mundin told himself. Corporate law!

The vision blinded him with its brightness.

Another new arrival was greeted cheerfully by the Titans. "Bliss, old man! Never thought you'd turn up for this nonsense. Old Arnold's going to tramp all over you again, as usual."

Bliss was thin and younger than most of them. "If a couple of you gutless wonders would back me up, we'd stop him. Anyway, what else have I got to do with my time?" Then archly, "I *did* hear something or other about a Miss Laverne . . . " It broke up in laughter.

Mundin dove into the breach. "How do you do, Mr. Bliss," he said breathlessly, taking the man's hand. "I'm Charles Mundin, Regular Republican candidate in the 27th District—and a small stockholder here."

The thin man gently disengaged his hand. "It's Hubble, Mr. Ermurm—Bliss Hubble. How do you do." He turned to one of the Titans and demanded with mock



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belligerence, "Didn't you get my wire, Job? Why haven't I got your proxy for the contract thing?"

"Because," Job said slowly, "I like old Arnold's policies so far. You'll rock the boat one of these days, Bliss—unless we kick you out of it first."

"Mr. Hubble," Mundin said insistently.

Hubble said absently, "Mr. Ermurm, I assure you I'd vote for you if I lived in the 27th District, which, thank God, I don't." His eyes were wandering. He headed across the room to buttonhole another Titan. Mundin followed him in time to hear, " . . . all very idealistic, I'm sure, my dear Bliss. But many an idealistic young man has turned out to be a hard taskmaster. I mean no offense."

Bliss Hubble was off again. Mundin judged that this last Titan was angry enough to talk to him. A vein was throbbing nicely in his reddened temple. Mundin asked in tones of deep disapproval, "Same old scheme, eh?"

THE Titan said angrily, "Of course. The fool! When young Hubble's seen as many raids on management as I have, he'll think twice before he tries to pull wool over *my* eyes. The contract thing indeed! He's trying to shake the faith of all of us in the present management, stampede a board election, bribe—oh, in a gentlemanly way, of course—bribe himself onto the board and then do as much damage as he can. But, by Godfrey, it won't work! We're keeping a solid front against him . . . " His eyes focused. "I don't believe I know you, sir. I'm Wilcox."

"Delighted. Mundin. Attorney."

"Oh—proxies, eh? Whom do you represent? Most of the chaps seem to be here."

"Excuse me, Mr. Wilcox." Mundin followed Bliss Hubble, who had thrown himself into a chair after another rebuff. He handed him the power of attorney from Don Lavin that Ryan had prepared.

"Hey? What's this?"

"I suggest you read it," Mundin said.

There was a patter of applause as half a dozen men came in. One of them — Arnold — said, "Good afternoon, gentlemen. Let us all be seated and proceed."

Mundin sat beside Hubble, who was reading mechanically. One of the new arrivals began to drone out the minutes of the last meeting. Nobody was paying a great deal of atttention.

Hubble finished reading, handed the document back to Mundin and asked with an amused smile,



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"Just what am I supposed to do about it?"

Mundin said sharply, "Looks foolish, doesn't it?"

Disconcerted, Hubble said, "I didn't say that. And—well, there have been rumors. Rumors to which you might have just as much access as I."

Mundin looked knowing. "We're not going to be greedy, Mr. Hubble," he said, wondering what he was talking about. "Assuming that I'm not a swindler and that isn't forged, how would you like to be on the board?"

"Very much," Hubble stated.

"We can put you there. Our twenty-five per cent voting stock plus your—?"

"It's a matter of record. Five and a half per cent. I vote the family holdings."

Mundin did sums in his head. Thirty and a half per cent. If they could take Hubble into camp and swing twenty per cent more . . .

He faced front. Let Hubble think it over for a while.

The minutes were accepted as read. One of the new arrivals grinned. "Now, gentlemen, to business. To begin with, election of a board member to replace Mr. Fennelly."

SOMEBODY proposed Mr. Harry S. Wilcox, the gentleman with the throbbing vein in his temple. Somebody else proposed a Mr. Benyon and nominations were closed. Secretaries moved among the stockholders with ballots, which they filled out after an inspection—brief and with deferential smiles—of the stockholders' proxies and share certificates. Mundin blandly presented his one share to a secretary's horrified gaze. The man gave him his ballot as if he were passing alms to a leper.

Wilcox won and there was a social round of applause and back-patting. From certain broad smiles, Mundin suspected the result of the balloting was as fixed as the morrow's sunrise.

He grinned at Hubble, who didn't seem to think it was at all funny.

"Coming in with us?" Mundin asked.

Hubble scowled.

The chairman passed on to the matter of compensation of officers. Mundin gathered, from the reading of a long, involved statement of capital gains and tax depreciations, that the corporation officers didn't think they were making anywhere near enough money.

During the reading, stockholders chattered sociably. Mundin began to wonder why they had bothered to come, for the raise was lackadaisically approved by a unanimous voice vote.



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At the next order of business, he found out why.

It was called, "Diversification of Raw Material Sources, with Special Reference to Alumina and Silicates." Mundin couldn't make head or tail of the dull technicalities, but he noticed that the sociable conversations tapered to a halt. One group, not more than four or five men, were putting their heads together with much figuring on the backs of envelopes and checking of records. Secretaries were running in and out with books and sheaves of documents as the reading droned on.

At last, the chairman said genially, "Well, gentlemen, the question. Shall we save time by asking for a unanimous vote of 'Aye'?"

A thin, gray old man rose and said, "I call for a record vote." He looked at an elaborately unconcerned man in the first row and quavered menacingly, "And let me say to you gentleman that I'm going to keep a copy of the record. And I will be guided by it in reaching future decisions, particularly during the last week of the coming quarter. I trust I have made myself entirely clear."

The chairman harrumphed and the record vote was taken.

THE proposition was defeated by a narrow margin, in an atmosphere of restrained passions. Mundin sensed dimly that there had just been a pitched battle—a corporate Gettysburg, a trial of strength between two mighty groups, with millions a year as the least part of the unseen stakes.

Hubble, beside him, was growing restless. Mundin leaned over and whispered, "You could hold the balance of power in a matter like that if you came in with us."

"I know. Let me see that paper again."

Mundin knew he had him.

The meeting continued.

There were three other clashes —Union Representation, Petition for Lowered Haulage Rates, and Committee to Study Design Improvements. Each time the struggle, while Hubble read the spots off the power of attorney and fished for information.

Mundin was noncommittal. "Yes, they're clients of mine. No, sorry, can't tell you just where Mr. Lavin is staying at present, I'm afraid. Yes, there is a sister. Mr. Arnold up there can probably give you more information than I."

"*Arnold* is in it?"

"Up to his eye-teeth. He'll probably attempt before long to —wait, here it comes now!"

One of the colorless secretaries was mumbling, "Proposal to rectify an anomalous distribution of voting stock. Proposal is to



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empower board to acquire—at par—dormant stock, dormant to mean stock unvoted since issue, provided time in question be not less than ten years, stock to be deposited in company treasury." It sailed through the air of the room without raising a ripple.

Mundin whispered, "Ask him how much stock is involved. That'll be your answer."

Hubble hesitated, then firmly rose, looking grim, and put the question.

Arnold smiled. "I'm afraid we haven't the exact figures. It's more of a contingency measure, Mr. Hubble."

Hubble said, "I'd be satisfied with an estimate, Mr. Arnold."

"No doubt. But as I said, we haven't got the figures. Now to proceed—"

Hubble began to look mulish. "Is the amount by any chance twenty-five per cent?"

Throughout the room, people sat up and conversations broke off short.

ARNOLD tried to laugh. Hubble snapped, "I repeat my question. Is or is not the amount of stock you are asking us to empower you to buy and deposit in the company treasury, under your control, twenty-five per cent?"

As it soaked in, there was a mild uproar. Hubble ignored it. "Is it or is it not, Mr. Arnold? A very simple question, I should think! And if the answer is 'no,' I shall ask to see records!"

Arnold grimaced. "Please, gentlemen! Please, Mr. Hubble! I can hardly hear myself think. Mr. Hubble, since you have objections to the proposal, we'll withdraw it. I presume I have the consent of all present for this agenda change. To pass on—"

"You do *not* have my consent to this agenda change, Mr. Arnold. I am still requesting information on the proposal."

Somebody slid into a seat beside Mundin, a big, handsome well-preserved old man. "I'm Harry Coett. What's this all about? I see you talking to Bliss and then all hell breaks loose. Say, weren't you with Green, Charlesworth? No? Thought I knew you. Well, what's up? Arnold's scared. You've got something. What is it?"

Mundin smugly asked, "What's in it for me?"

The man started. "Hell, boy, I'm *Harry Coett*. Where are you from, anyway?"

A third party joined them as the debate between Hubble and the chairman raged and spread. "You seem to have put Hubble onto something, young man. I like spirit. Somebody told me you were an attorney and it hap-



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pens there's a vacancy in our law staff. Quite a vacancy. I'm Roadways, you know. George Nelson's the name."

Coett snapped, "I was here first, George!"

By then, the floor debate had escaped from Hubble's hands. Scenting blood or gold, half the stockholders present were fighting for the chance to question Arnold, who was sweating and grimly managing not to say a thing—at great length. The other half of the stockholders seemed to be clawing their way into the group around Mundin, the odd young man who seemed to know things.

Mundin, smiling politely and meeting no one's eye, heard the whispers and conjectures: "—an attorney from the S.E.C., I guess, going to throw the book at old Arnold for—" "—into camp, but how do you know it isn't Green, Charlesworth or—" "No, you ass! Proxies! They've been quietly—"

JUDGING the time to be ripe, Mundin said politely, "Excuse me, gentlemen," and stood up.

"Mr. Chairman," he called. Arnold pointedly avoided his eye and recognized somebody else—who was at once the goal of a ten-yard dash by Harry Coett. Coett whispered urgently to the man, who said, "I yield to Mr. Mundin."

"Thank you," said Mundin. "Perhaps I can clarify this confused situation. However, Mr. Arnold, first I should like to talk to one of my principals—the young lady."

"Principals?" Arnold asked distractedly. A secretary murmured something to him. "Oh. Miss Lav—oh, certainly. She'll —uh—be free to talk to you immediately after the meeting is concluded. Is that satisfactory, Mr. Urmurm?"

"Quite satisfactory."

And that was that. It was far more than he had dared hope for. Not only had he thrown an egg into the corporate electric fan, so that half the stockholders in G-M-L were swarming around him, but Arnold was returning Norma as his price for not "clarifying the situation." Arnold's raid had blown up in his face. Far less than getting the Lavin stock to vote, he would be lucky to hold his domination of the board.

Mundin sat down, comfortably — and silently — acknowledging leading questions and offers from the Titans with polite nothings.

The stockholders' rebellion began to peter out. With Mundin quieted, angry and uncertain men perceived that some sort of deal had been made under their noses. They didn't like it. They had done it themselves too often



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to enjoy feeling the spur on their own flesh. One of them called for unseating Arnold, but majority opinion was—wait until this Mundin tells what he knows.

The rest of the meeting went at breakneck speed.

Hubble spent much of it insisting, "Damn it, Mundin, you made *me* the first offer! The hell with these vultures. They'll use you and throw you away. I'm the only heavy stockholder in the company with an open mind and—"

"Nonsense!" Harry Coett said decisively. "I don't know what you're up to, Mundin, but whatever it is, it'll need financing. And I'm *Harry Coett*. Let me handle—"

George Nelson said, "Tell him what you did to old Crowther, why don't you? *He* needed financing, too."

MUNDIN never did find out what Harry Coett did to old Crowther. As the meeting was adjourned, he buttonholed Arnold, who gave him a wan smile. "Come and see me, Mr. Mundin. I'm sure we can get together. Don't we know each other? Weren't you with Green, Charlesworth?"

"The girl, Arnold," Mundin demanded.

"Miss Lavin is waiting for you in the reception room."

Trailing tycoons, Mundin raced outside.

Norma Lavin was there, pale and angry. "Hello, Mundin," she said, not so crisply. "You took your time about it." And then she was weeping on his chest. "I didn't sign it. I knew Don wasn't dead. I didn't sign. I—"

"Shut up, superwoman," Mundin snapped. "Stop giving things away to the eavesdroppers. Your every word is golden." But he found that he was also shaking—from the reaction to the hours of strain. And unexpectedly but emphatically, from—Norma.

He got a grip on himself as Coett, behind him, mused, "So *this* is the young lady Arnold horse-traded you, eh? Your principal, Counselor?"

"Maybe," Mundin evaded.

"Oh, come off it, Mundin," Coett said shrewdly. He turned to Norma. "My dear, can I drop you any place? You, too, of course, Counselor."

"Listen, Mundin," Nelson urged. "Get him to tell you about old Crowther."

"Damn it!" raged Hubble. "If you vultures will step aside . . ."

Mundin said, "I'll lay it on the line, gentlemen. Miss Lavin and I have to stop in the waiting room to pick up an—uh—a young lady. In five minutes, we will be at the front entrance. We'll go along with all three of you or



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with any two of you. You fight it out among yourselves."

He swept Norma out to the visitors room. Lana was perched on the receptionist's desk, looking hostile—but not as hostile as the receptionist. Mundin asked her, "What happened to Bligh?"

"Outside," Lana replied. "He said he'd already had a bellyfull of Field Days, whatever he meant by that. This your girl?"

"Yes," said Mundin. "This is my girl."

The three of them collared Norvie Bligh, sitting in the Sun outside, and started toward the ranks of parked cars and halftracks. They were met by an amicable committee of three.

"All settled, Mundin," Hubble said happily. "Coett and Nelson are coming with us."

"Good. Where do we talk?"

Hubble said joyously, "Oh, my place. You'll like it — simple, quiet, but comfortable."

They made quite a procession —two cars and a halftrack. They didn't stop for anything, neither the Itty-Bitty checkpoint nor the customs shed. In well under five minutes, they were on the open road for Hubble's place.

## XIV

LANA was tugging at Mundin's shoulder. "I want to go home," she told him.

Mundin said peevishly, "Sure, sure." Norma, exhausted, had fallen asleep on his arm and its circulation had been stopped for the past ten miles. The girl was a solid weight—but, he was thinking, a curiously pleasant one.

"I mean now," Lana insisted. "I got a duty to the Wabbits."

"I'd kind of like to go, too," Norvie Bligh chimed in. "If you won't be needing me, I mean."

Mundin eased Norma's head off his arm. She stirred, mumbled, "Arglebargle damn men think they're . . . " and was asleep again.

Mundin flexed his arm, considering. Lana and Bligh had fulfilled their bargains. There wasn't likely to be much need for bodyguards for the next little while—and not too much that Lana, for instance, could do, cut off from her gangs.

He said, "All right. I'll have the driver let you off at Old Yonkers and you can get a bus or something."

At Old Yonkers, their car stopped at an Inter-City depôt. The car behind skidded to a stop beside them. Hubble, Nelson and Coett—none of whom had trusted any of the others alone with Mundin and Norma for the ride —peered out anxiously.

"Anything wrong?" Hubble yelled from a window.



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Mundin shook his head and let Lana and Norvie out.

Twenty minutes later, the motor caravan reached Hubble's house.

Quiet and comfortable it was—simple it was not. It was a Charles Addams monster in a fabulous private park in Westchester. They rolled up its driveway and parked next to what appeared to be a 1928 Rolls-Royce limousine.

Bliss Hubble was already at the door of the car, holding it open for them. "My wife," he explained, indicating the limousine. "She makes a fetish of period decoration. Today, I see, it's Hoover—all last week, it was neo-Roman. Can't say I care for it, but one has one's obligations."

"And one has one's wife," said Norma Lavin, who appeared to be back to normal acid self.

"Oh, it's quite nice," Mundin said diplomatically. "So stately."

MRS. Hubble greeted them with an unbelieving look. She turned to her husband with an explain-*this*-if-you-can air. Being a thin brunette with cheekbones, she did it very well.

Hubble said hastily, "My dear, may I present Miss Lavin . . . "

"Just 'Lavin,' please," Norma said coldly.

"Yes, of course. Lavin, and Mr. Mundin. You know Harry and George. Mr. Mundin has been good enough to compliment the way you've fixed up the house, dear."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Hubble, ice forming on her gaze. "Thank Mr. Mundin and explain to him that his taste matches that of the housekeeper. Suggest to Mr. Mundin that he might consider employing the housekeeper, who has been out of a job since I woke up this morning and found she had set the house for *this* unsightly, trashy piece of construction. Inform Mr. Mundin that when the housekeeper left—rapidly, I might say—she took off with *all* of the key settings, and I have been condemned to roam through these revolting rooms until my husband chose to come home with his keys so that I might change them to something resembling a human habitation."

Hubble stiffened, thrust a hand in a pocket, brought out a set of keys. His wife took them from him, turned and swept off through the vast, gaudy rooms.

"Sensitive," Hubble muttered to his guests.

Coett said eagerly, "We got a couple of things straight on the way over, Mundin. Now . . . "

"Harry, I insist!" Hubble said severely. "I'm the host. Let's not



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rush things until we've had dinner."

He led the way through a majestic corridor, keeping carefully to the middle.

He said sharply, "Watch it! Stand back!"

The others, obeying his gesture, stood clear of the walls, which were in curious, shimmering motion.

"My wife," Hubble explained with a glassy smile. "You'd think a regular bubble-house wall would be enough. No, nothing will do but full three-D illusion throughout. The expense! The stumbling home in the dark! The waking up in the middle of the night because the four-poster is changing into a Hollywood bed! She's a light sleeper, you see . . . "

The walls had firmed up now. The old furniture was fully retracted and gone, new pieces had formed to replace them. Mrs. Hubble's present preference appeared to be Early Wardroom—a satisfactory enough style for the flying bridge of a heavy cruiser, but not really Mundin's idea of how to decorate a home. He pointedly did not comment on the steel-gray walls.

The dinner seemed like a very good notion to Mundin. The tadjin ahmar he had eaten at Hussein's seemed a very long way in the past.

A SHAMBLING butler, wearing sharp dress blues, served them. His presence seemed to make Hubble jumpy. The table talk was not sparkling.

"Am I to understand," Hubble probed gently, "that Miss Lavin — that Lavin, I mean to say—was actually abducted by Mr. Arnold?"

"Doubt it very much," said Norma, chewing. "He probably just looked unhappy and said, 'Dear me, I wish something could be done about that outstanding stock.' Some foot-kisser standing by set the wheels in motion. Arnold's hands would be clean. Not *his* fault if people insist on exceeding their authority."

She took another forkful of wild rice. "They had me for about a week. God almighty, what confusion! I could go and I couldn't go. I was free to leave any time I cared to, but temporarily they thought it would be better if they kept the door locked. Sign your residuary legatee's share of the stock to us and we'll pay you a cool million. But we don't *want* the stock, of course. It has only a certain small nuisance value. Now, lady, are you going to be reasonable or do we have to get tough? My dear girl, we wouldn't dream of harming you!"

She scowled. "Arnold came to see me once. He kept pretending



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*I* was trying to sell to *him*. I don't know, maybe that's what somebody told him. All I know is, I feel as if somebody hit me over the head with a lighthouse."

The shambling butler asked, "Are you at home to Mr. Arnold, sir?"

Hubble said delightedly, "No! You hear that, Coett?"

Nelson cut in, "Hold it a minute, Bliss. Are you sure you're doing the right thing? Maybe if we all get together, we could—" he looked quickly at Mundin—"that is, perhaps *all* of us could freeze out the Toledo bunch."

Coett said, "Tell him to go to hell. Tell the *butler* to tell him, so we can hear you do it. First we settle things among ourselves—then we figure who else we have to cut in. My guess is nobody."

"Tell him," Hubble said gleefully to the butler. As the man shambled off, he turned to Nelson. "Harry's right, George. Figure it out. You've got eleven per cent under your thumb, counting the voting trust. I've got five and a half, solid. Harry has three of his own and he influences—how many, Harry?"

"Nine," Coett said shortly. "*Heavy* influence."

"You see? That's plenty, with these people's twenty-five per cent."

Mundin kicked Norma's foot under the table, just as she was opening her mouth to ask how they had located the stock. He said rapidly, "Don't you think we should save this until dinner's over?"

Hubble cast an eye around the table. "Why, dinner's over now," he said mildly. "Let's have our coffee in the library—it'll be a little more comfortable."

HUBBLE stopped at the entrance to the library and did something with a switchbox before permitting the others to enter.

"Have my own controls here," he said proudly. "Wife has most of the house—hah-hah—she can't begrudge me one little den of my own. Let's see if we can't get something more cheerful."

The "library"—there was nothing resembling a book or microfilm in sight—shimmered and flowed, and turned into something that looked like a restoration of a 19th Century London gentlemen's club.

Mundin tested one of the wing-back chairs and found it good. Norma was still looking at him suspiciously—but she was silent.

He said cheerily, "Now, gentlemen, to work."

"Right," said Harry Coett. "Before we get too deep, I want to know how we stand on one thing. I'm sure it's just one of those crazy things that get start-



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ed, but I heard somebody say something at the meeting. They said you were from Green, Charlesworth. Just for the record, are you?"

Green, Charlesworth. Ryan had mentioned them, Mundin recalled. They seemed to be something to worry about. Mundin said definitely, "We are *not* from Green, Charlesworth. Miss Lavin and her brother are the direct heirs of one of the founders of G-M-L. I—uh—happen to have a small amount of stock myself, as well as being their attorney."

Coett nodded briskly. "Okay. Then it's a plain and simple raid and we've got the strength to do it. I take it we are all agreed, then, that the first step is to throw the corporation into bankruptcy?"

Mundin gaped. "What?"

"*Thought* you were no expert," Coett said amiably. "What did you expect, Mundin?"

"Why," Mundin floundered, "there's your stock and our stock and—well, majority rules, doesn't it?"

He stopped. They all were enjoying a polite laugh. Coett said, "Do you seriously think we could vote our stock *outright* under the existing rules?"

"I don't know," Mundin said honestly.

"You can't. The proxies won't stand for it. A raid, yes, but handled *right*."

Norma Lavin commented, "I suppose he's right, Mundin. They've stopped us so far, one way and another. The only real change is that now these three ghouls know we're alive and think they can easily take us to the cleaners."

"Please!" protested Hubble and Nelson.

Coett, grinning, assured her, "You are absolutely correct. For the first time, I begin to doubt that we can do it."

Mundin interrupted, "Why bankruptcy?"

They stared at him. Finally, Hubble asked, "How would *you* do it, Mr. Mundin?"

MUNDIN said, "Well, I'm no corporation lawyer, gentlemen—I leave that aspect of it to my colleague, Mr. Ryan, who is a member of the Big Bar. But it seems to me that our first step is, obviously, to form a stockholders' committee and request an accounting from the present board. We can back it up, if you think it necessary, with a notification to the S.E.C. I know that Arnold's group will stall and attempt to compromise, probably offer us some kind of board representation, something far less than our holdings entitle us to. But that's simple enough to



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handle. We simply protest and file suit in—"

"Risky," Nelson objected.

Coett said, "That won't get us to first base. I remember when the Memphis crowd tried—"

"The who?" Mundin interrupted.

"Arnold's group. They took G-M-L away from the Toledo bunch eighteen years ago through due process, the way you're talking about. But it took six years to do it—and if the Toledo bunch hadn't been caught short in Rails, Memphis never would have made it. And Toledo is still strong—you saw how Arnold had to put Wilcox on the board to please them."

Mundin said desperately, "Can't we at least try?"

"Waste of time! We have before us an immense mass of capital. It has inertia, Mundin—inertia. You can't move it with a feather—you need dynamite. It's going to take time and brains to budge it. I'll tell you how."

And he did. Mundin listened in growing bewilderment and something that came close to horror. Bankruptcy! How did you put a corporation worth fourteen billion dollars, eminently solvent, unbelievably prosperous, into bankruptcy?

He didn't like the answers when he heard them. But, he told himself, you can't make an omelette


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without breaking a few golden eggs.

Coett, enjoying himself, was planning in broad, bright strokes. "Bliss, you get your chaps on the petition for composition and arrangement. We'll spring that one ourselves, before they think of it, and we'll want it ready. Then . . . "

Mundin, grimly taking notes, stuck through it to the end. But he wasn't enjoying the practice of corporate law nearly as much as he had always thought he would. He wished urgently for the presence of old Ryan. And a nice full box of opium pills.

IT was nearly midnight. Mundin had never felt so drained in his life. Even Norma Lavin slumped in her chair. Coett, Hubble and Nelson were bright-eyed and eager, skilled technicians doing the work they best knew how to do.

But the work was done. Mundin, yawning, dragged himself to his feet. He said tiredly, "So the first thing for me to do is set up offices, eh?"

Harry Coett sighed. "Not *quite* the first thing, Mundin."

"What then?"

"Call it a matter of personal satisfaction. We've all heard rumors about young Lavin. I don't say they're true. I don't know if they are or not. But *if* they're true, we don't get off the ground."

Mundin blazed, "See here, Coett—"

"Hold on. We've all had a look at that paper of yours. It's a power of attorney, all right, and I've no doubt that it's valid. But it isn't a proxy, Mundin. It doesn't mention G-M-L stock in it anywhere, except in the affidavit at the end—and Don Lavin didn't sign that himself."

"What do you want?"

Coett said, "Let me tell a fantastic story. Mind you, I don't say it's true. But it's interesting. There are two young people, a brother and sister, for instance. One of them has some stock, but can't use it. The other is—temporarily out of circulation. Let's suppose that a smart young lawyer gets hold of them. First thing he does, he walks in on a meeting and lets it be known that the stock exists. With that as a wedge, he pries the girl loose from wherever she is.

"With the girl, he sucks in three good, dumb Joes—like Hubble, Nelson and me, for instance. With the dumb Joes in the palm of his hand, he squeezes recognition of the stock out of, for instance, Arnold. That's pretty good work—he has the girl and he has the stock. The question is, what do the dumb Joes have then?"

*God!* thought Mundin. *And I*



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*never believed in mind-reading!* He said, "Am I supposed to take this fantasy seriously?"

"Of course not. Just for the sake of the record, before we get too far involved in any of this, let's see the stock. Will tomorrow morning be time enough?"

"Tomorrow morning will be fine," Mundin said hollowly. "Come, Norma."

Hubble's chauffeur—now driving what appeared to be an admiral's staff car—convoyed them home. The house, from outside, had become a gray stone and ivy barracks. Mundin watched it dwindle behind them.

Since he was pretty sure the chauffeur was under orders to hear anything they said, they didn't talk.

So it wasn't until they were back in Belly Rave that Norma asked bitterly. "Well, Mundin? Is tomorrow morning time enough to locate the stock?"

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Next month's conclusion of GLADIATOR AT LAW by Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth draws its concealed weapons and blasts its way to a furious climax. Never has there been a more one-sided battle—a handful of nobodies, armed only with ingenuity and audacity, against the greatest concentration of financial and economic power in all history! The stakes, though, are larger than money or influence; they're the fulfillment of a dead man's dream! And speaking of dreams—now that you've seen what has happened to the New York Stock Exchange, wait till you meet the horrors that occupy the Empire State Building! A few in the past have known they existed, but now you will see them for yourself . . . and wonder where they are today and what they are doing . . . and what's in it for them.

William Tenn's novelet, PARTY OF THE TWO PARTS, is probably the most bewildering and exasperating interstellar detection and legal problem ever explored before the fact. If it doesn't have you rolling on the rug, you should have your funny-bone checked and oiled!



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In order to discover competent new writers of humanistic science fiction, the American Humanist Association and GALAXY *Science Fiction Magazine* have agreed to co-sponsor a Humanist Science Fiction Short Story Contest. The object of this contest is to find GOOD fiction—we are not interested in thinly disguised sermons. Although stories entered in the contest should have a humanistic approach, chief weight in the judging will be given to freshness of theme, sharp characterization and interpersonal conflict, and ingenuity of plot development and solution of the problem used as the basis of the story. Entrants who are not familiar with science fiction should study GALAXY, available for 35c at most newsstands, or from 421 Hudson Street, New York 14, N. Y.

All prize-winning stories will be printed in GALAXY. The first-prize story will also appear in *The Humanist.* For further information on the contest and literature describing the Humanist viewpoint, write to Humanist Story Contest, Yellow Springs, Ohio.

## — RULES OF THE CONTEST —

- All entries must be between 2500 and 5000 words in length.
- Manuscripts must be typed in black, double-spaced, on plain white bond paper. The author's name and address must appear on the manuscript itself.
- There is no limit to the number of entries per student, but each must be accompanied by the following form or its equivalent:

..... (Entrant's Name) .....

..... (Name of College) .....

Signed .....(Faculty Member).....

- Entries postmarked later than November 30, 1954, cannot be accepted.
- A stamped, self-addressed envelope must be included at the time of entry if the author wants his manuscript returned.
- A MINIMUM *first prize* of $500 will be awarded as soon as judging is completed. An ADDITIONAL $250 will be paid by GALAXY if the prize-winning story is accompanied by a $3.50 subscription to GALAXY Magazine. This, however, will not have any bearing on the judging.
- Other publishable stories will be purchased by GALAXY at 3c a word, with a $100 minimum purchase price.
- Mail all entries to:

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Yellow Springs, Ohio



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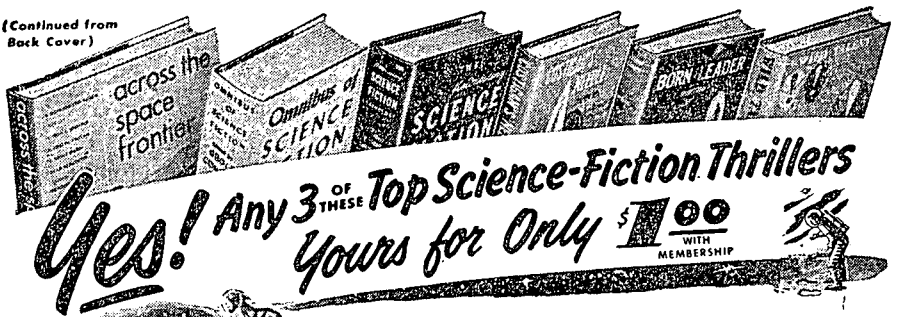


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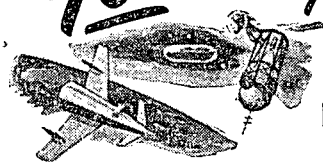

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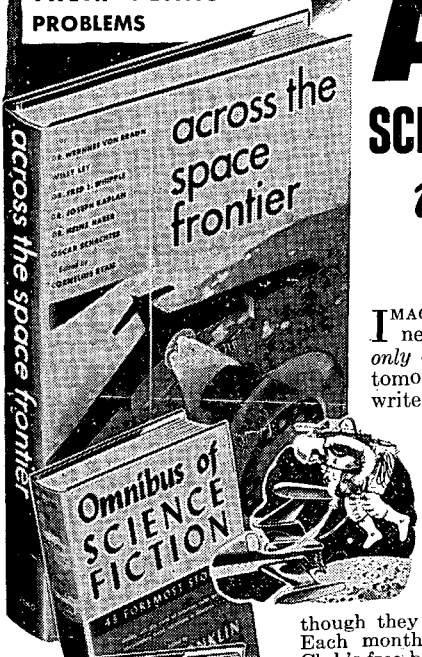


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